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SUPERSTITION AND SOCIETY

# PSYCHO-ANALYTICAL EPITOMES

*Editor:* JOHN RICKMAN

- No. 1. *A General Selection from the Works of Sigmund Freud.* Edited by John Rickman.
- No. 2. *Love, Hate and Reparation.* Two Lectures by Melanie Klein and Joan Riviere.
- No. 3. *Superstition and Society.* By Roger Money-Kyrle.



# SUPERSTITION AND SOCIETY

ROGER MONEY-KYRLE

Based on six lectures delivered in the Summer  
of 1937 at the Institute of Psycho-Analysis



PSYCHO-ANALYTICAL EPITOMES

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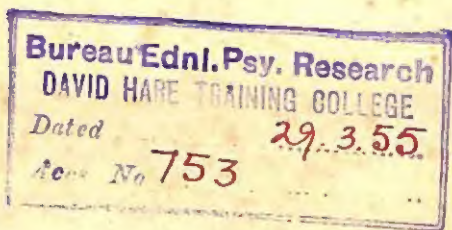
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## PREFACE

THE work of scientists is often for long periods of importance and interest only to themselves, then a discovery is made or a well-known fact is seen to be of general validity and suddenly that branch of science becomes socially important; by this I mean that the discovery gives mankind new power to control the forces of nature.

In the field of psychology the forces of nature lie within man's own nature and consist in his motives, or desires, and of his anxiety or guilt, which may arise when his desires are going to be carried out.

The discovery that has made psychology a socially important science is a method of viewing ourselves in a more objective way than was possible before.

Man has not always made his impulses and his institutions an object of study; he has been observant of other people's motives and the behaviour of other groups for a longer time than he has studied his own personal problems and those of his tribe. There has always been a difficulty in the way of an objective understanding of the self. Some of that difficulty has been removed by the discoveries of Freud, who has helped mankind to see in what way subjective bias influences judgment—the fact has been known from the earliest days, the *way* in which subjectivity operates is the new discovery.

This way of thinking about the personal and social forces in man takes into account the influence of suffering. It is true that pain has never been ignored, but heretofore it has been regarded as exerting a



general influence over mood. Psycho-analysis shows that not merely the *Weltanschauung* but the function of the mind itself is shaped by mental pain.

The discovery of this repugnant truth was the first step in the direction of making psychology a socially important science because it threw light on some of man's motives that were formerly obscure. The second step came with a realization that there is a connection between man's conscience and the forces which bind him to the group in which he lives. It has been found that the relation of the individual to society is determined in part by his instinctual endowment, in part by the culture which moulds those instincts while, during infancy and childhood, they are still plastic.

Politically-minded people of Left and Right wings have been quick to seize on the possibilities which this early plasticity appears to afford them to mould the coming generation to their way of thought. Here it seems to me science can render a second service. First it forges the instruments for man to use, then it must discover ways to prevent their misuse. But science and scientists in themselves have no power except by the spread of knowledge; the only way in which psychology—the youngest but predestined to be the most powerful branch of science—can help mankind is by showing that a greater understanding of the forces working within the mind, a knowledge of the hidden fears, a capacity to recognize and control the influence of egoism and hate, is the best security for dealing with the troubles which come to us as individuals and as members of society.

Dr. Money-Kyrle's approach to this problem is through a study of beliefs and superstitions. His

method is to make a brief historical survey of the views that have been put forward to account for these beliefs and superstitions, so that his reader may see how the science of Society advances.

JOHN RICKMAN.

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Regent's Park,  
London, N.W.1.  
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ROGER MONEY-KYRLE.

Whetham,  
Calne,  
Wilts.



## CHAPTER I

### PSYCHO-ANALYTICAL ANTHROPOLOGY: ITS ORIGIN AND VALUE

CONSIDER the man who is born and bred within the limits of a homogeneous society, whether this is a small savage tribe or one of the many classes into which civilized nations are divided. If he is well adapted to this society, he is likely to take its values too much for granted. He thinks they are part of the common heritage of man, and therefore unalterable, when in reality they are local products of a specific education. He cannot understand, or sympathize with, other nations or other classes who do not share these values, and so despises or disapproves of them. In short, he is insular, narrow and intolerant.

If, on the other hand, he is himself badly adjusted to the society in which he lives, he will not share its values and may wish to change them. But if he knows nothing of other cultures he is likely to have the most superficial ideas about the internal workings of his own. He does not understand the interdependence of its several parts, and therefore fails to foresee the distant repercussions of the changes he desires. He will make the same mistake as the landowner who, in his ignorance of ecology, destroys his badgers, stoats and weasels to protect his game, and then finds that a plague of rabbits have destroyed his crops and trees. He may produce a new society; but it will not be the utopia of which he dreamed.

Anthropology, or rather social anthropology, has much to offer both the too complacent and the too progressive. Its effects on the too complacent are first to convince him that it takes all sorts to make a world, and then to raise a doubt whether after all his own society has found the best possible solution of the art of life. Its effect on the too progressive is first to make him pause to think and then to equip him with some knowledge of the properties of the material on which he works—a knowledge without which no craftsman can hope for much success. For these reasons, anthropology is an essential part of any liberal education.

In particular, it is certainly an essential part of the education of a psychologist. The psychologist, no less than the man in the street, is apt to take his own society too much for granted, and to mistake local peculiarities for general characters. For instance, among civilized peoples, children pass through what Freud called a latency period, in which the sexual impulses are in abeyance, between the age of five and puberty. This was at first believed to be a general developmental character, as inevitable as the growing of one's second teeth. But, according to Malinowski, Trobriand children, and according to Róheim, Central Australian children, have no latency period at all: the sex instinct ripens from infancy to adolescence without a break. Whether race or education is responsible for this difference is another problem. If, as I suspect, education is largely responsible, it should be possible to find two cultures of the same race, for example, on two Melanesian islands, in one of which the latency period was absent and in the other present. In this way a psychological problem could be solved by anthropology.

The case of the latency period is an example of the more general problem of how to apportion the responsibility for psychological traits between heredity and environment, between nature and nurture, which is almost insoluble so long as one is confined to a single culture. But from the records of many different cultures it should be possible to discover whether the traits in question are correlated with ethnological or with sociological factors.

If the psychologist needs the help of the anthropologist, it is no less true, I think, that the anthropologist needs the help of the psychologist, and especially of the psycho-analyst. The anthropologist makes records of customs and beliefs, classifies them both geographically and by similarity, seeks to reconstruct their origin and development, to trace their diffusion and to determine their social function and their influence upon each other; and lastly, he tries to uncover their motives, which, especially in primitive communities, are often far from obvious. Now it can no longer be denied that some motives are unconscious. We repress certain desires and yet continue to behave as if they were still operative. We then attribute our behaviour to secondary and quite inadequate motives. In other words, we rationalize it. According to psycho-analysis, the bulk of our behaviour is of this kind. Even if unconscious motives are less numerous and important than psycho-analysts maintain, there is no excuse for neglecting them altogether. The anthropologist who will have no truck with the unconscious condemns himself to leave at least some part of his own material unexplained.

Thus anthropologists and psycho-analysts need each other's help. Indeed, the sociology of the future



will be, I think, the product of their combined labour. This sociology will expose the reciprocal relations between culture, character and education; the factors determining whether groups will diverge or converge, compete or co-operate, and so on. It will give us the power to control our social destiny, not blindly as in the past, or short-sightedly as at present, but with a clear vision of our path ahead. Moreover, with greater knowledge of ourselves and of our social structure, our social aims are likely to become less divergent. Some divergence of politics is of course inevitable; but the more obviously irrational policies, by-products perhaps of the psychoses of their authors, will not find much support in a more enlightened age.

Such an age of enlightenment, when we shall understand the social conditions of peace and happiness, however, is itself still a distant goal, and many calamities may await our culture before we reach it. The sociology on which it will be based is still an infant. What this infant science will become is a matter of speculation. But that it is full of promise and well worth fostering will be clear, I think, if we review the achievements it has already made.

An historical approach has many advantages. Any attempt to present an unfinished science as a finished system is soon obsolete and may bring temporary discredit upon the science. But if its history is followed, superannuated theories appear no longer as failures, but as partial successes, advances that, even if they deviate a little from the direct line of progress, bring it a little nearer to its goal. By this means, too, one learns to view its present position with more caution, and in a just perspective, not as the final word, but as the latest

member of a series of approximations towards a still distant truth. Lastly, by this means, one learns something of the methods and absorbs something of the enthusiasm of earlier pioneers, and gets one's bearings for the road ahead.

In this book, therefore, I have reviewed some of the stages in the development of an infant science, born of the natural if at first unblessed union of anthropology and psycho-analysis, and speculated a little about its future prospects. But my survey is neither complete nor strictly chronological. Many important contributions are unmentioned. I have selected only a few problems in the order in which they have been raised, and tried to present the solutions, not as dead and finished structures, but as organisms still undergoing growth.

Of the two parents of this infant science, one, psycho-analysis, is itself scarcely adolescent, the other, anthropology, is very old, for Herodotus is said to have been its father. The motives that have inspired anthropological research have been many and varied. The idea that a study of other cultures might be applied to the improvement of one's own was familiar both to Aristotle and to Machiavelli and is gaining ground again to-day. But for the most part the motives have been less practical. Among these, mere idle curiosity is quite conspicuous—not the curiosity that asks questions, but the curiosity that delights in the strange habits of other folk, which seem to bring out in sharp and flattering contrast our own eminently sensible and virtuous behaviour. An important, and genuinely scientific, motive is the interest in social origins, which was powerfully stimulated by Darwin's theory of the origin of species. And last, but by no means least, is the urgent

desire to explain—or to explain away—those curiosities of custom and belief which seem to challenge man's pet illusion, namely, his conception of himself as *homo sapiens*, the one rational and moral being upon earth.

In the social philosophy of the eighteenth century, even the savage was supposed to be rational, or at least noble. According to Rousseau and his followers, our savage ancestors first made their institutions deliberately and with intelligence to serve their reasonable ends. But, in course of time, these institutions were exploited by a section of the community, in their own intelligent self-interest, to the detriment of the rest. Everyone would be happy if society would only return to its primitive condition.

The picture of man's rationality and nobility was always flattering. But, unlike Rousseau, nineteenth-century Europeans confined this designation to themselves. The myth of the noble savage had been exploded. Travellers' tales and missionary reports were becoming well known, and Europeans compared the supposed rationality and virtue of their own institutions with the obvious irrationality and wickedness of those of the misguided heathen.

This superior attitude was greatly modified by the influence of Darwin. If man's physical and mental character was the culmination of a long process of biological evolution, it was natural to suppose that civilized culture was the culmination of a long process of social evolution. The early stages of man's social, as well as of his physical, structure became an object of research. But where were the analogous 'social fossils' to be found? A systematic collection of weapons, pottery and other products of primitive and prehistoric man was

already being made; and it soon became apparent that many of the utensils of primitive tribes of to-day have striking resemblances with those of the prehistoric inhabitants of Europe, who were believed to be our ancestors. What more natural than to suppose that, if present-day savages resembled our prehistoric ancestors in their productions, they might resemble them also in their social organization. Till then, descriptions of primitive cultures had been, for the most part, mere curiosities of literature—something to be woven into boys' stories of adventure, or to flatter and amuse one's vanity, like illustrated jokes at the expense of the unlettered members of our own society. Now, however, savage cultures became interesting because they were thought to represent past stages of our own. The progress of civilization was still, of course, compared very favourably with the backwardness of savages. But when savages ceased to be degenerate cousins, possibly even unrelated products of a separate creation, and became living portraits—or so it was thought—of our ancestors, it was no longer possible to regard them with quite the same contempt.

The search for social origins, origins of law, origins of marriage, origins of religion and so on, led to a re-examination of existing records and an active demand for systematic field research. But the material collected raised more problems than it solved. A great part of the customs and beliefs of savages was unintelligible to an age which still believed rationality and virtue to be natural to man. They were a challenge, something that had to be explained, or explained away. Strenuous efforts were made to prove that the more glaring absurdities



resulted from lack of knowledge rather than from defect of mind, and were therefore rational after all, or alternatively, that they were mere functionless vestiges, maintained by tradition, of customs and beliefs that were once rational. M. Lévy-Bruhl, on the other hand, evidently impressed by the poor success of such efforts, described savages as prelogical, with minds differing in kind, not merely in degree, from our own.

None of these explanations was satisfactory. A large part of primitive custom and belief is irrational. Yet a regard for tradition alone, as I hope to show, cannot account for its emotional importance. Nor can the savage be dismissed as prelogical, for, in his secular affairs, he is as logical as we are. In short, anthropology was faced with problems it had not the technique to solve, so long as it was confined to a psychology of conscious motives. Irrational behaviour has an unconscious basis, and is unintelligible until this basis is explained.

Take, for instance, the field of mythology. There was a great collection of myths from all parts of the world—fantastic and, to that age, often repulsive dramas of ancestors and gods. What, for instance, could be made of the Greek myth of Cronus, who castrated his father, the sky-god Uranus, and married the earth-goddess Gaea, who was probably the same person as his mother, Rhea? Or of the parallel Maori myth of Tane Mahuta, who separated his parents, Rangi and Papa, Heaven and Earth? It was impossible to overlook the frequency of themes of incest, parricide and castration, and attempts were made to give explanations that were both innocent and intelligible. The most absurd and most universally accepted theory was Max Müller's. According

to him, myths were products of a disease of language. The existence of grammatical gender, he thought, facilitated a confusion between things and persons; so that statements about the sun and moon and earth were converted, in course of time, into statements about gods and goddesses. In this way the sun-god's incest and castration could be explained away as misinterpretations of statements about the sun entering the dawn, being eclipsed and so on.

Such rationalizations are no longer taken seriously; and modern anthropologists, less easily shocked than their Victorian fathers, now take mythological impropriety for granted. Nevertheless, the problem remains. Why are myths so often concerned with certain themes that even classical apologists regarded as improper and irrational? Anthropology could give no complete or satisfactory answer.

Here, then, was an obvious opportunity for the new science of psycho-analysis, whose special territory was the irrational (and in popular opinion also the improper) area of the human mind. Freud had already published his *Interpretation of Dreams* and his *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*. The Œdipus complex, the infantile and unconscious desire to kill the father and sleep with the mother, had been discovered, as well as the tendency to distort the fulfilment of such desires in dreams and fantasies. Some of Freud's followers were quick to apply what he had taught them. In 1909 Abraham published his *Traum und Mythos*, and Rank his *Mythos von der Geburt des Helden*, followed in 1912 by his *Inzest-Motiv in Dichtung und Saga*.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> English translations: *Dreams and Myths. A Study in Race Psychology*, 1913; *Myth of the Birth of the Hero*, 1913 (Nervous and Mental Disease Monograph Series. Nos. 15, 18).

The analogy between the dream and the myth was very close; both contained the same themes of incest, parricide, castration, etc., which seemed in both to have been subjected to the same kind of distortion. A myth therefore, like a dream, was a representation, originally dramatized perhaps, of repressed desires common to mankind. This, indeed, may not be a complete explanation. But at least it explains the irrational and improper elements which earlier mythologists had tried unsuccessfully to explain away.

Take three other fields, those of exogamy, totemism and taboo. All cultures have a horror of incest, though their conceptions of what constitutes incest differ very widely. What is the cause of this horror? Many theories were suggested, of which at this stage it will be sufficient to mention only two. The horror was attributed, on the one hand, to an instinct, and on the other, to insight into the evil consequence of inbreeding. Both theories are improbable: the first because, if the horror were instinctive, it would not need the support of the heavy penalties that are everywhere inflicted upon transgressors, and the second because savages are unlikely to have discovered racial disadvantages of inbreeding the existence of which is still disputed by biologists. Here, then, in the horror of incest, was another social product that anthropology sought to rationalize, but was unable wholly to explain.

Freud, however, by analysing his patients had been able to reconstruct the process by which, in them at least, the horror of incest was developed. As children, they had had strong incestuous impulses, which they had repressed, and which were replaced in consciousness by a horror not only of intercourse

with the original love-object, but also of intercourse with anyone unconsciously associated with (i.e. who symbolized) him or her. It was natural to suppose, therefore, that among savages also this mechanism must be much the same.

Exogamy, or the habit of regarding marriage with fellow clansmen as incestuous, is often linked with totemism. A totem clan is a group of people, usually related matrilineally, who identify themselves with, and believe themselves to be descended from, some species of animal or plant. What was to be made of such an irrational belief? Herbert Spencer derived it from the supposed tendency to call people after the animals they most resembled. Thus if a man was brave, he might be called 'Lion,' and his remote descendants, taking their genealogies too literally, might believe that they were actually descended from lions. Neither this, nor similar theories were very plausible; and the irrational beliefs of totemites remained extremely puzzling, until a clue again turned up in an unexpected field. Freud, in the course of his work, had occasion to study the animal phobias of children. Many children develop, not only a great respect and dread of certain animals, but also a marked tendency to identify themselves with the very animals they are afraid of. In other words, they invent for themselves something very like a private system of totemism; they are spontaneous totemites. Now the 'totem' of the civilized child invariably turned out to be unconsciously identified with, that is, to be a symbol of, some member of his own family, usually his father. Here again, it was natural to suppose that similar results have similar causes, that primitive totemism is an institutionalized form of the animal



phobias and obsessions of our own children, and that the totem of a savage clan is a parental, most often a father, symbol. At any rate, if the totem is a father symbol, two common characteristics of totemism at once become intelligible: the prohibition against killing the totem animal, and the prohibition against marrying a fellow totemite.

These prohibitions are particular examples of a wide class of magical avoidances known as taboos. The chief characteristic of a taboo is its apparent irrationality. It need serve no social function, nor need it be upheld by any law. The taboos on lighting three cigarettes with one match and dining thirteen at one table are not socially valuable, nor are transgressors executed or even sent to gaol; yet these are rigorously observed by many of the savages of Europe. There is, however, a certain survival of the fittest among taboos. Those which are useless often die out; those which are useful—if only accidentally—tend to be fortified by laws. For this reason, some anthropologists have sought to make them intelligible by arguing that they always have a function, or at least that they are survivals of avoidances that were originally useful. The irrational element in them, however, cannot be so easily disposed of. Once again Freud found a clue in the civilized neurotic, who invents his own taboos—unless he can find ready-made ones suitable to his needs. He tends, in fact, to avoid obsessively whatever symbolizes his unconscious but inadequately repressed desires. If, for instance, he unconsciously desires to stab his mother or his brother, he may be unable to touch or even see a knife without an attack of paralyzing dread. The inference is obvious. The taboo-ridden savage is an obsessional

neurotic who has institutionalized avoidances of this kind.

I will take two other fields of irrational behaviour and belief that can only be explained in terms of unconscious mechanisms; namely the fields of magic and animism. Magic consists in the performance, or avoidance, of certain acts, the consequences of which are irrationally believed to be beneficial or disastrous. If a man cleans the carburettor when his magneto is at fault, his action springs from an erroneous, not an irrational, belief. He is not a sorcerer, but a misguided engineer. This distinction is important, because at one time, in the desire to prove man more rational than he seemed, magic was explained away as faulty science. Magic may be a forerunner of science, but it is a great deal more than faulty science. That this is so, is at once apparent from the analyses of those in our own culture who practise magic, even when they do not consciously believe in it. Obsessional neurotics, as we already know, practise negative magic in their system of taboos. The actions they taboo symbolize, to them, the satisfaction of a repressed desire. But obsessional neurotics also practise positive magic; they have compulsive rituals as well as compulsive avoidances. Such rituals are of two kinds, or rather they form a scale with rituals of two opposite kinds at each end. At one extreme, the repressed desire is symbolically dramatized in the ritual; at the other, it is repudiated by the ritual, which has therefore the same intention as a taboo and is often, as it were, an expiatory or purificatory act after the accidental breaking of a taboo. That similar mechanisms operate in primitive magic can hardly be in doubt. Here too, Freud was the first to point the parallel.

Magic is associated with animism and animatism. Animism is concerned with the belief in spirits, which inhabit things or persons, and animatism with the belief in impersonal but supernatural forces, which often emanate from them. Now in animism and animatism may be found, I think, the core of human irrationality, the source from which nearly all irrationality may be derived. For, as analysis has shown, in particular the work of Mrs. Klein, it is not only the savage who believes himself to be aided or persecuted by spirits and supernatural forces. Every child passes through a stage of similar belief; and in later life even the sanest of us show traces of the neurotic and psychotic disorders which are one of the legacies of this stage.

The psychological mechanisms underlying animism and animatism are too complex to be summarized here. They will have to wait for a later chapter. I should like to suggest, however, that superstition is one of the chief characteristics that distinguish man from other animals. He is separated from them, not as theologians believe by the possession of a soul, but by his conscious or unconscious belief that he possesses one, or at least that he possesses or is influenced by supernatural power. If, therefore, we can trace the origin of this belief, we may be able to throw some light on another problem, namely, the origin of culture.

Lastly, if psycho-analysis can discover some of the conditions that have separated man from other animals, human society from animal society, it may also discover some of the conditions that have separated one type of man, or one type of culture, from another. In these two fields, Dr. Róheim is already a pioneer. His bold theories have been little

understood. But they are highly stimulating and well worth following up. For if we can once discover the factors that determine the nature of a culture—whether it is happy or depressed, idle or industrious, aggressive or pacific, and so on—we may be able to mould our own culture more in accordance with our dreams.

So far, I have surveyed, very briefly, a few fields in which I think anthropology and psycho-analysis can help each other, and in which I hope both will ultimately help the world. In the following chapters I shall try to cover the same ground in greater detail.



## CHAPTER II

### MYTHOLOGY

#### I. GENERAL DISCUSSION

IN the beginning, according to Greek mythology, which is in many ways typical of that of other peoples, was Chaos. Out of Chaos came Gaea, the earth, who parthenogenetically created Uranus, the heaven.

Uranus married his mother Gaea, and by her begat several children, whom he hated and confined in Tartarus. But Gaea persuaded her youngest son, Cronus, to castrate his father—which he did with a sickle from behind just when Uranus was preparing to have intercourse with her. Out of the drops of blood sprang the Gigantes and the Erinyes.

Cronus, having in this way succeeded his father, married his sister Rhea, who was probably the same person as his mother (and grandmother) Gaea, and in his turn begat several children, whom he promptly swallowed. But Rhea saved the youngest son, Zeus, by giving her husband a stone wrapped in cloth, which he swallowed believing it to be his son. When Zeus grew up he gave an emetic to his father, who vomited his swallowed children, none the worse for their experience. Last of all he vomited the stone.

Zeus, who was now the ruler of the sky, married his sister Hera, and by her begat a family, who on the whole seem to have treated him with commendable respect. His son Hephaestus, however, once took Hera's side in a quarrel with her husband. But

this time the father was victorious. Hephaestus was thrown out of Heaven and lamed by his fall.

Besides his legitimate family by Hera, Zeus had many children by other women. One of his natural sons, Tantalus, was the founder of a family distinguished for its crimes. Tantalus himself cut up his son Pelops, cooked him, and served him up at a banquet of the gods. But Pelops was restored and lived to arrange a fatal chariot accident for his father-in-law, by bribing the charioteer to remove the linch-pins. Pelops' sons Atreus and Thyestes murdered their half-brother. Thyestes then seduced Atreus' wife; and Atreus, after killing his own son in mistake for a son of Thyestes, succeeded in killing Thyestes' two legitimate sons, whose flesh he placed before their father at a banquet. But another son of Thyestes, Aegisthus (whose mother was both Thyestes' own daughter and Atreus' second wife) remained to kill Atreus and avenge his brothers' murder.

Atreus' son Agamemnon, too, came to an untimely end; for having sacrificed, or tried to sacrifice, his daughter Iphigenia, he was murdered, on his return from Troy, by his wife Clytaemnestra, who had committed adultery with his father's murderer, his cousin Aegisthus. Lastly, Agamemnon's son Orestes, incited by his other sister Electra, killed his mother Clytaemnestra and so avenged his father's death. But Orestes, unlike his ancestors, was purified and lived happily to a ripe old age. The family curse seems to have exhausted itself with his act of matricide.

Such is one version of the story, which seems to have been composed from several originally independent myths. What is to be made of such irrational abominations, wondered the Greeks of the

philosophic age. All the crimes from incest, parricide, cannibalism and adultery, to mere deceit and theft, were imputed to the gods and heroes, who were also represented as the victims of the most humiliating and ridiculous misfortunes. How then could a reasonable man revere supernatural beings endowed so richly with all the faults he most despised in his fellows? At once to honour morals and respect the gods was indeed a difficult feat, which taxed the ingenuity of classical apologists. Thus the attempt to explain, or rationalize, myths began already in classical times, when it was first noticed with concern that the behaviour of the gods fell far short of the standards acceptable to men.

According to pagan philosophers, myths were distorted versions of historical events, ethical parables, or allegorical representations of natural phenomena. Only the early fathers of the Church accepted the literal truth of all the stories to the discredit of the pagan gods, who were thus proved to be diabolic rather than divine. While in the seventeenth century, when the gods of Greece and Rome had ceased to compete with those of Palestine, theologians, with greater tolerance but equal credulity, sometimes regarded the classical myths as debased forms of the true revelation only to be found in Scripture.

Modern mythologists have elaborated some of the old theories and added fresh ones of their own. Of these latter, the best known seeks the origin of myths in ritual drama enacted to produce a magical effect. So far, then, we have distinguished four theories: the historical theory, the parable theory, the allegory theory (which date from classical times) and the ritual theory (which is modern). We will consider them in turn. In doing so, however, it is important

to remember the question with which mythology began: why are myths so often irrational and shocking. No theory that fails to answer it can be regarded as complete.

(a) *The historical theory.* To the true believer myths are records of historical events; and although no one any longer takes them literally, they are often still supposed to be based on actual records which have been fantastically distorted in the process of transmission. According to this view<sup>1</sup> they are really not myths at all, but legends, and much ingenuity was at one time wasted in trying to reconstruct the history thought to lie behind them. Thus, to take an extreme example, the shower of gold with which Zeus impregnated Danae in her prison was interpreted as the money with which her guards were bribed. Partly perhaps as a reaction to such absurdities, it has now become more usual to regard the majority of legends as myths, rather than the majority of myths as legends. Even where, as for example in the *Iliad*,<sup>2</sup> there is probably an element of historicity, this may be a late accretion to the myth, not the core around which it grew. The legend of an actual siege may have been fused with a much earlier myth.

(b) *The parable theory.* Æsop composed, or collected and revised, fables for a moral purpose. And myths, like that of the house of Atreus, were sometimes quoted in classical times as a warning to the impious. The moral factor is still more evident in biblical

<sup>1</sup> Held by Cicero, Euhemerus, Lactantius, St. Augustine, and more recently, by Sahagun and Herbert Spencer.

<sup>2</sup> Acting on the assumption that the *Iliad* was based on actual history, Schliemann discovered the site of Troy.



mythology. But here as elsewhere it is almost certainly a result of secondary elaboration. The most archaic myths are so much concerned with the improprieties of gods that they can hardly have been composed by legislators, as Aristotle thought, to edify mankind.

(c) *The allegory theory.* This has several forms. According to one form, the castration or dismemberment of a god might represent, for instance, the eclipse or waning of the moon; or a divine incest, the daily fusion of the sun with his mother dawn. So effective, indeed, were such methods in saving the face of primitive man that at one time mythologists fell over each other in their haste to convert all gods and heroes into suns and moons and stars.

According to Max Müller's variant of this astronomical theory, the apparent allegories were not even intentional. The use of grammatical gender, he thought, had converted bald statements of scientific fact into indecent and absurd theology. If, for example, the word for sun was *apollo* and masculine, whereas the word for dawn was *daphne* and feminine, the statement that the sun follows the dawn would give rise to the myth of Apollo's pursuit of Daphne. In this way, he thought, 'the silly, senseless, and savage element' in myths could be explained away.

Max Müller's prestige was so great that for a long time his theory held the field. It was rather tentatively criticized by Tylor, and finally destroyed by Andrew Lang (who used it to prove that Mr. Gladstone was a solar myth). Tylor, while leaving the Aryans to Max Müller, argued that primitive man's tendency to personify nature was independent of language.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, we can go further, and

<sup>1</sup> R. R. Marett, *Tylor*, 1936, p. 93.

suggest that linguistic gender, which incidentally occurs only in the Aryan, Hamitic and Semitic languages, is itself an effect rather than the cause of such a tendency.

To Andrew Lang,<sup>1</sup> myths were not so much representations of natural phenomena, as crude explanations of them. He presupposed primitive man's animism, his tendency to endow the sun and moon and stars, the woods and streams and mountains, with souls, or at least with powers and feelings like his own. Given these beliefs and an unsatisfied curiosity about nature, it seemed natural that primitive man should invent 'just so stories' to explain the problems of his world. Myths, therefore, were 'just so stories' and nothing more. By deriving them from animism, this theory raises the more general problem of animistic thought. It does not explain the irrational and improper element in them, nor their strong emotional appeal without which they could not have survived.

Andrew Lang, however, did not claim that all myths were explanatory. He distinguished a class of heroic and romantic myths which fell outside this head.

(d) *The ritual theory.* This theory, according to which myths were once ritual dramas, probably contains more truth than any of the others. The Central Australians of to-day dramatize, in their magical ceremonies, the mythical adventures of their totemic ancestors.<sup>2</sup> And the ancestors of all civilized peoples dramatized the marriage and death of gods of vegetation in rites believed to be essential to the fertility of men, animals and plants.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 9th Edn., Art: 'Mythology.'

<sup>2</sup> Róheim, *Riddle of the Sphinx*, 1934, pp. 85-6.

<sup>3</sup> Frazer, *Golden Bough*.

Certainly the connection between myth and ritual is very close. But which came first? According to one view, the ritual is the child of the myth, it re-enacts or commemorates what is believed to be an historical event. The passion play of Oberammergau is ritual in this sense, though, as far as I know, it is not believed to have any magical effect. Similarly, the Eucharist is said to commemorate the Last Supper and the death of Christ. And Freud argued that the sacramental killing of gods, in general, commemorates the killing of the father of a primal horde.<sup>1</sup> But to Lord Raglan, such views are as improbable as that the average Briton would be prepared to plunge an arrow into his eye to commemorate the death of Harold.<sup>2</sup> According to his view, which has been expressed, less forcibly perhaps by several other authors,<sup>3</sup> ritual is not the child but the parent of myth; it is a drama performed for its magical efficacy and the stage directions of this drama constitute the original form of the accompanying myth. For instance, he derives the myth of Œdipus from a ritual parricide and incest which magically rejuvenated nature.

On the basis of this second form of the 'ritual' theory we may perhaps reconstruct the development of a typical myth as follows. Most savages hold ceremonies in which they identify themselves with supernatural beings, and which they believe to be followed by certain magical effects. In particular, as we know, the ancestors of civilized peoples

<sup>1</sup> *Totem and Taboo*. Freud's theory will be further discussed in the next chapter.

<sup>2</sup> *Jocasta's Crime*, 1932. p. 44.

<sup>3</sup> E.g. J. M. Robertson, Miss Harrison, Professors Hooke, Rose, Cook and Malinowski.

worshipped human gods of vegetation, compelling them to marry and to die in a ritual drama, in order to secure successful crops. Now the ritual recurred, with very little change, at stated intervals, probably once every year. Therefore the human god, in doing what the god should do, also repeated what he had done before. The myth was last year's ritual; this year's ritual was a repetition of the myth.

In course of time, we may suppose that the attitude of the worshippers underwent a subtle change, what had originally been a divine event became the commemoration of a divine event. The central figure in the tragedy ceased to be the god, but the man who personated the god, at most, the man who was temporarily possessed by the spirit of the god. Thus the myth was removed from its setting in the ritual and projected into a distant past.

The myth, once well separated from the ritual, developed independently. Elaborate stories, for example, grew up around the figure of Adonis, one of the priest kings and sacrificial victims of Semitic ritual magic. 'Mirrored in the glass of Greek mythology,' writes Sir James Frazer, 'the Oriental deity appears as a comely youth beloved by Aphrodite. In his infancy the goddess hid him in a chest, which she gave in charge to Persephone, queen of the Nether World. But when Persephone opened the chest and beheld the beauty of the babe, she refused to give him back to Aphrodite, though the goddess of love went down herself to hell to ransom her dear one from the power of the grave. The dispute between the two goddesses of love and death was settled by Zeus, who decreed that Adonis should abide with Persephone in the under world for one part of the



year, and with Aphrodite in the upper world for another part. At last the fair youth was killed in hunting by a wild boar, or by the jealous Ares, who turned himself into the likeness of a boar in order to compass the death of his rival. Bitterly did Aphrodite lament her loved and lost Adonis.<sup>1</sup>

The marriage of Adonis, perhaps to two successive brides, his sacrifice, perhaps originally in the form of a boar, and the lament of his queen were almost certainly features in the ritual on which the myth was originally founded. But in its final form the myth is a great deal more than a mere record of stage directions. It has undergone a vast amount of secondary elaboration.

The myth of Adonis may also serve to test the allegory theory. Adonis spends part of the year in the under world, like seed in the ground, and part in the upper world, like the growing crops. In other words, he imitates the crops; for by this means the crops are magically compelled to imitate him. Thus the myth is, in fact, an allegorical account of the cycle of vegetation. But it is an allegory or 'just so story,' not because it was composed to satisfy mere idle curiosity, but because the ritual on which it is founded necessarily imitates nature in order to master her and compel her to give regularly her gifts to man.

The other two theories, which regard myths as distorted history or moral parables respectively, have less to offer. But they, too, often contain some truth. It may well happen that certain incidents in the lives of some of the priest kings who personated gods like Adonis are added to the myth, which thus comes to contain an element of historicity. (Conversely incidents

<sup>1</sup> *Golden Bough*, 3rd Edn., v, p. 11.

from myths may become attached to historical records of the lives of kings, especially of those who played their part in ritual drama.) As to the parable theory, if a myth, such as that of Adonis, is incorporated in a higher religion, it is certain to acquire a moral purpose. The devout will take their god as a model for themselves. Or, if they have begun to doubt the literal truth of the myth, it will become a parable.

At first sight this reconstruction, borrowing as it does something from four separate theories, may seem satisfactorily complete. But it leaves several questions untouched. It does not explain the irrational and improper elements, which perplexed and shocked mythologists from the fifth century B.C.<sup>1</sup> to the nineteenth century A.D. It does not explain why nature should be represented by ritual dramas of certain fundamental types, all of which have a strong emotional appeal that survives long after the belief in their magical efficacy has died out. And lastly, by moving the centre of interest from mythology to magic, it raises as many questions as it solves. Why, for instance, should a drama of incest and parricide promote the magical rejuvenation of the world?

Magic will have to wait for a later chapter. The rest of this one will be devoted to the irrationality, the impropriety and the emotional appeal of myths. These three qualities can, I think, only be understood in the light of what psycho-analysis has taught us about the human mind. Therefore I must begin by saying something about this most misunderstood of sciences.

<sup>1</sup> Among the early interpreters may be mentioned Theagenes of Rhegium (580 B.C. ?), Heraclitus, Socrates (Plato) and Metrodorus. Andrew Lang, 'Mythology,' *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 9th Edn., xvii, p. 136.

## 2. THE PSYCHO-ANALYTIC CONTRIBUTION TO MYTHOLOGY

Psycho-analysis<sup>1</sup> is in essence a method introduced by Freud for treating neurosis, and consists in following the train of a patient's uninhibited thought (his free associations) until it leads to the hitherto unsuspected sources of his trouble. These usually turn out to be certain forgotten experiences and fantasies of early childhood. The older generation used to say, and no doubt many people still believe, that childhood is the happiest period of life. But this is because they tend to forget most of their early sorrows. Not only many of the child's experiences but also many of his fantasies are terrifying and painful, and for this reason they are forgotten or—to use a stronger word to distinguish this process from the mere forgetting of unimportant episodes—repressed. All of us, even the most normal, have repressed in this way a great deal of our early past—especially our early romances, our loves and jealousies and hatreds, the disappointed first products of our erotic and aggressive instincts. Now although these early and very painful passions are repressed and long since forgotten, we behave, to some extent, as if they were still operative—almost as if we shared our bodies with other more primitive beings who influence us considerably, but without our knowledge. It is convenient therefore to describe such repressed passions as active but *unconscious*, and to conceive of ourselves as possessed by *unconscious memories and fantasies*, which affect our actions and our conscious thought.

<sup>1</sup> For a short account see Freud, *Encyclopædia Britannica*, Art.: Psycho-analysis; or *A General Selection from the Works of Sigmund Freud*, Psycho-analytical Epitomes, No. 1.

In particular, our unconscious fantasies find a distorted expression in our day-dreams—those heroic stories composed by all children and many adults—and still more our dreams at night. Indeed, perhaps the quickest road to some understanding of the unconscious is to analyse a dream, that is, to follow the free associations until they lead to the unconscious fantasy that gave rise to it. The unconscious fantasy is called the *latent content* of the dream, as opposed to the conscious dream or *manifest content*. The process of distortion by means of which the latent is converted into the manifest content usually continues even after waking, that is, we tend to forget some elements in the dream and to alter others in order to make the dream more rational. This is called *secondary elaboration*.

Although there are an infinite variety of dreams, many of them can be recognized at once as belonging to certain well-known types. These are thinly disguised representations of certain fundamental unconscious fantasies common to all mankind. Now it is a remarkable fact, pointed out by Abraham<sup>1</sup> and Rank<sup>2</sup> in 1909, that such typical dreams have a very close resemblance to the best-known types of myth. The inference is obvious: both are distorted representations of the same fundamental unconscious fantasies.

Let us consider some of these fantasies in turn, and seek to find their parallels in myths.

(a) *Parricide and incest*. Although he would soon indignantly deny it, every boy child builds unconscious fantasies of ousting or even killing his father

<sup>1</sup> *Dreams and Myths. A Study in Race Psychology.*

<sup>2</sup> *Myth of the Birth of the Hero; Das Inzest-Motiv in Dichtung und Saga*, 1912.



and marrying his mother—and probably of killing his brothers and marrying his sisters too. These themes find an almost open expression in a great number of archaic myths. Of the first three generations of Greek gods, Uranus, Cronus and Zeus, all married their mothers or their sisters, and two rebelled against their fathers. (Uranus, of course, being parthenogenetically created, had no father to rebel against.) These Greek myths, in which the child's family romance is projected upon the gods of sky and earth, are by no means isolated examples. Indeed they are only variants of a type of cosmic myth found not only among the Greeks, Babylonians and Egyptians, but also in Africa, India, China, New Zealand and even in America.<sup>1</sup> In these myths the Sky-god and Earth-mother were once locked in a continuous embrace until one of the sons, usually the youngest, separated them, sometimes castrating his father and marrying his mother. In New Zealand, Tane Mahuta is the youngest son and plays the part of the Greek Cronus.

Very possibly the story of Œdipus himself—the classical example of parricide and incest—may have originated as a cosmic myth of this kind. But it has been elaborated by the genius of Greek imagination into one of the most powerful dramas of all time.

Everyone knows the story. Laius, king of Thebes, was warned by an oracle that he would perish by the hands of his own son. Accordingly, when his wife Jocasta gave birth to a son, he pierced the child's feet, bound them together, and exposed him on mount Cithaeron. There he was found by a shepherd and brought to the palace of Corinth, where he was

<sup>1</sup> Frobenius, *Das Zeitalter des Sonnengottes*, 1904, ii, S. 1268 seq. From Rank, *Das Inzest-Motiv*, S. 270.

called Œdipus, because his feet were swollen, and brought up by Polybus and Merope, the king and queen, as their own son. But when he was full grown his legitimacy was questioned by a Corinthian, so that he went to Delphi to consult the Oracle, who told him that he was destined to kill his father and marry his mother. Thinking that he was Polybus's son, he sought to avoid his destiny by avoiding Corinth. Soon afterwards, while on the road, he met a chariot, and was somewhat peremptorily ordered to make way, whereupon he slew the owner of the chariot and the charioteer. He next came to the neighbourhood of Thebes and met the Sphinx, a female monster who sat on a rock and killed everyone who could not solve her riddle.

'A being with four feet has two feet and three feet, and only one voice; but its feet vary, and when it has most it is weakest,' said the Sphinx.

'Man,' said Œdipus, 'for in infancy he crawls on all fours, in manhood stands erect on two feet, and in old age supports his tottering legs with a staff.'

The Sphinx was so enraged at the solution of the riddle that she threw herself from the rock and was killed. (In another version, Œdipus slew her.)

Before this, the Thebans, whose own king had died by an unknown hand, had promised their kingdom to whoever should rid them of the monster, so that Œdipus was made king and married the widowed queen, without knowing that she was his mother. By her he begat many children and lived many years in peace. Eventually, however, the country of Thebes was stricken by a plague, which the Oracle said would cease only when the unknown murderer of Laius had been expelled. Œdipus accordingly consulted the seer Theiresias and was told by him that Laius was

the stranger in the chariot whom he had killed and his own father. On discovering that he had committed both parricide and incest, he tore out his eyes; and Jocasta, his wife and mother, hanged herself.

Here, as in the myth of Cronus, the unconscious fantasy is hardly disguised at all. But the criminal intention is repressed. Œdipus kills his father and marries his mother without recognizing them—an extenuating circumstance added perhaps during the period when Œdipus, if he originated as a god, was being degraded to the rank of hero. It is this slight distortion which gives the myth its intense dramatic force. Had Œdipus recognized his parents all along, his motives would have seemed too foreign to our conscious thought to enable us to identify ourselves with him. The myth would have seemed remote and unreal, like the myth of Cronus's revolt against his father Uranus. We should have been unmoved. As it is, however, our own unconscious Œdipean fantasies are stirred, but not stirred enough to bring about their immediate and total repudiation. (Incidentally, it is worth observing that the device of disguising a near relation as a stranger is a very common means by which unconscious is converted into conscious fantasy. For this reason, the mysterious stranger who turns out to be a father or mother, or perhaps a king or queen, that is, a symbol of a father or mother, is a typical figure in folklore and mythology.)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A good example of an 'unintentional' parricide and incest is found among the Kalangs. These people believe themselves to be descended from a dog who married a woman. Their son killed his father and married his mother without knowing who they were. (Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy*, iv, p. 173.)

Besides explicit Œdipean myths of this kind, in which parricide and incest are undisguised, there are a whole series that display different degrees of distortion, certain elements being repressed and replaced by symbols.<sup>1</sup>

Often the characters are disguised. In a very common type of myth a brother takes the place of the father and a sister of the mother. But sometimes a variant gives the deeper meaning, e.g. Cronus's wife, Rhea, for instance, is his sister, but she is also identified with his mother Gaea. Again, in the official Egyptian myth, Osiris is slain by his brother Set, and avenged by his son Horus. But in some texts, Horus and Set are twins or one and the same person, so that Set becomes the son, rather than the brother, of Osiris.<sup>2</sup> In another type of myth, the son falls in love with his stepmother, as in the story of Don Carlos. Sometimes the guilt is disowned and attributed to or 'projected' upon the stepmother:

<sup>1</sup> It is difficult to tell, in each case, whether such distortions occurred when the unconscious fantasy was first expressed in a myth or ritual drama, or during the process of its transmission. Even when a variant of a myth comes nearer to the unconscious fantasy than the orthodox version, there can be no *a priori* certainty that the variant is older. It may represent what analysts call a 'return of the repressed.' A day-dream may be developed towards, as well as away from, its unconscious prototype; and there is no reason why a myth should not do the same. The psycho-analyst can say, with a fairly high degree of probability, what a myth means to the unconscious and where it is distorted. He cannot say when it has been distorted.

<sup>2</sup> Wallis Budge, *The Gods of the Egyptians*, 104; ii, p. 194; ii, pp. 241-2. From Róheim, *Animism, Magic and the Divine King*, p. 28.



Phaedra falls in love with her stepson but it is the stepson who is punished. Then again there is the slightly more distorted form in which the hero falls in love with, or is loved by, his master's wife, as in the legend of Joseph and Potiphar.

Not only the actors, but also the action or its motive may be disguised. Cronus is given an emetic by his son Zeus in the official myth; but in one variant he is castrated, like his father Uranus. Hephaestus quarrels with his father, not from jealousy which is a motive in unconscious fantasy, but solely in order to 'protect' his mother. It is worth while to compare his myth with that of Ixion. Hephaestus, son of Zeus, and Ixion, a mortal whom Zeus had befriended, were both thrown out of heaven, Hephaestus for taking the part of his mother, Hera, in a quarrel with Zeus, Ixion for trying to seduce her. In the Hephaestus myth, the sexual motive of the conflict, in the Ixion myth, the identity of the father, is repressed. In both the father is victorious.

(b) *Punishment and reparation.* Since the child not only hates but also loves his father, his aggressive fantasies are seldom consistent. They nearly always contain a strong element of reparation, in which he undoes the crimes he has committed in his fantasy. Moreover, he often imagines a talion punishment, in which he suffers what he wished to inflict. (This is partly because such punishment is felt to be a form of reparation, partly because it represents a renewed attack on the father whom he has in imagination already killed and incorporated, and partly because it satisfies his feminine component and so gives masochistic pleasure.)

Such characteristics of unconscious fantasy are

also found in Ædipean myths. Sometimes the crime is punished, sometimes undone, sometimes prevented altogether. Ædipus is punished: he blinds himself. In the myth of Osiris, the crime is undone and the reparative element is stressed. Osiris had been killed and castrated by his brother Set, who seems originally to have been the same person as his son Horus. But in the official version, Horus is the avenger who castrates Set and gives his own eye (which Set had torn out in the battle) to restore his father Osiris, that is, to take the place of the phallus which had been cut off by Set. In the Hephaestus and Ixion myths, the crime is prevented altogether, and the rebellious son defeated.

The influence of reparative tendencies in remodeling a myth during its development is brought out strikingly by comparing the official Osirian myth with what seems likely to have been its original form. At first sight the cosmic myths of Greece and Egypt are almost complete reversals of each other. In Greece, Uranus and Cronus are the sky gods and Gaea and Rhea the mother earth; but in Egypt Seb or Geb is the earth-god and Nut the mother sky. Like Cronus and Zeus, Osiris seems to have castrated his father Geb. His own enemy, however, is not his son Horus, but his brother Set, who kills him and cuts him up. Moreover, his sister-wife, Isis, unlike Gaea and Rhea, who aided their sons' revolt, is faithful to her husband, and hunts up and down the Nile for the pieces of his body until she finds them all, except the phallus which had been eaten by the fishes. His son Horus, too, unlike Zeus, takes his father's part, defeats and castrates Set with the loss of an eye, which he gives Osiris to eat, thereby restoring him to life. But that the touching devotion

of Isis and Horus is a reversal of the original theme becomes probable when we remember that in some texts Horus is identical with Set, and that Isis may be identified both with her sister Nephtys, Set's wife and Osiris's mistress, and with a certain queen Thueris who had aided Set.<sup>1</sup> Thus the original myth, which seems to have been nearer both to the Greek version and to the unconscious Oedipian fantasy, may be reconstructed more or less as follows: Horus-Set kills and castrates his father Osiris and marries his mother Isis-Nephtys, who had assisted his revolt. While the Greeks kept their cosmic myth in its most archaic form, the Egyptians, by the device of splitting one character into two or more separate persons, converted parricide into filial piety. A similar reversal of what was obviously the original theme seems to have given rise to the Egyptian tale of the brothers Anoupu and Bitiou. Anoupu accuses Bitiou of seducing his wife, and Bitiou castrates himself to prove his innocence.

(c) *Castration.* That small boys should wish to castrate their fathers and fear castration in revenge may seem incredible. Nevertheless this theme is found to be a regular constituent of unconscious fantasy, so that we ought not to be surprised when we find it always turning up in myths. Cronus castrates Uranus, Zeus castrates Cronus in one version, and gives him an emetic in another. Osiris castrates his father Geb, and Horus, his uncle Set, and Set castrates his brother Osiris. But significantly enough, in myths of the son's punishment for his revolt, where we might expect on the talion principle to find another castration, we often find some lesser

<sup>1</sup> See Róheim, *Animism, Magic and the Divine King*, 1930, p. 27 ff.

injury—such as laming or blinding—which we may nevertheless interpret as symbolic of it. Œdipus blinds himself; Horus is blinded by Set, that is, if Horus and Set are really the same person, he blinds himself, and gives his eye to restore his father as if it were a substitute for the missing phallus. Hephaestus was lamed when he was thrown out of heaven; and Œdipus' swollen foot may have been an additional punishment for his crime.<sup>1</sup> But in the myth of Attis, it is the motive rather than the act of self-castration that is disguised. Attis appears sometimes as the son, sometimes as the lover, of Cybele. Not wishing him to belong to any other woman, she inflicted him with madness at his wedding, so that he castrated himself. If the incestuous desire had not been projected upon the mother, the act of self-castration would be intelligible as a self-punishment as in the myth of Œdipus.

But the idea of punishment itself is probably foreign to the original myth and ritual. Originally, no doubt, the son who deposes and castrates his father is ultimately deposed and castrated by his son, as in the myth of Cronus. This may be simply the life cycle of the divine king who ritually dismembers his predecessor and is in turn dismembered by his successor. But later generations might easily interpret the fate of the king as a punishment for the murder or castration of his predecessor, since such a sequel to the crime corresponds with their own unconscious fantasies.

The idea of swallowing the castrated penis, which psycho-analysis often finds in unconscious fantasy,

<sup>1</sup> In unconscious fantasy effects, e.g. the punishment of laming, frequently precede their causes, e.g. the parricidal crime.



is a fairly common theme in myths. Osiris's penis was swallowed by the oxyrhynchus—a fish which is sacred to a town of the same name, of which Set appears as patron deity,<sup>1</sup> so that we may guess that originally Set swallowed it himself. Horus' eye, too, which to the psycho-analyst is a phallic symbol, was swallowed by both Set and Osiris.

(d) *Matricide*. Corresponding to the boy's fantasy of killing his father and marrying his mother is the girl's fantasy of reversing this procedure. But this female version of the Œdipus complex, sometimes called the Electra complex, seems comparatively rare in myths—possibly because the rituals from which they sprang were masculine productions. Even the myth of Electra herself, which at first sight represents the unconscious fantasy of women rather than of men, may have originated as the product of a masculine fantasy and have been only later—after its connection with ritual had been broken—elaborated from the feminine point of view. At any rate, in classical times Electra is represented as a female Hamlet, brooding over the murder of her beloved father Agamemnon and deciding to kill her mother Clytemnestra in revenge. This, except for the distortion of the motive from jealousy to revenge, looks like a simple female version of the Œdipus complex. But it is Electra's brother Orestes who actually performs the deed. Moreover Orestes is far more than the tool of Electra's will. He is the principal hero of the myth. What then were his motives? What is the unconscious fantasy behind his act?

(e) *Primary Aggression*. We know from analysis that we especially desire to punish others when they

<sup>1</sup> Róheim, *Animism, Magic and the Divine King*, p. 31.

commit crimes that we ourselves have only with difficulty repressed. One may argue, therefore, that Orestes, in killing his mother, is punishing her for his own parricidal wishes. But I think the Orestes myth also arises from, and appeals to, deeper motives than this.

That the child's jealousy of the parent of the same sex as itself begets unconscious hatred was one of Freud's earliest discoveries, to which we may now add the discovery, due mainly to the work of Mrs. Klein, that sadism begins at the breast and in the cradle, and that the mother is its first object to babies of both sexes. In the boy, then, aggressive fantasies towards the mother precedes the Œdipean hate of the father. Indeed, the concept of the bad father who sadistically assaults the mother is formed, at least to a great extent, by the child disowning his own aggression and projecting it upon his father. 'It is not I,' he says in effect, 'who want to tear my mother in pieces and eat her,'<sup>1</sup> but my father. Therefore I am quite justified in killing him. In fact, I must do so in order to protect my mother.' Thus Orestes' act in killing his mother would seem to have at least two motives: he is not only punishing her for his own parricidal impulses, he is also satisfying his still more primitive impulse to attack her sadistically himself.

Orestes was the last criminal of the house of Tantalus, whose former members were doomed to destroy each other. The family curse seems to have spent itself after accomplishing the most ultimate, the most terrifying of all crimes, the destruction of

<sup>1</sup> I have heard a child of three say that he wanted to tear his mother in pieces and eat her; but this already represented an attempt to master a terrifying unconscious desire by turning it into a conscious joke.

the primary 'good object,' the mother, on whom the child's life and happiness depend. All anxiety perhaps can be traced to the dread of losing, or destroying, this object. And even the Greek fantasy, usually so ruthless, seems to draw back before such a final abyss of dread and loneliness; for, unexpectedly enough, the myth of Orestes has a happy ending. He finds his sister Iphigenia, whom he had believed dead, and brings her, together with the image of Athene whose priestess she is, to Athens. He is then freed from the curse and unlike his ancestors lives happily to a ripe old age. The mother is, as it were, rediscovered in the person of the sister. The unconscious is reassured that the crime had not been committed after all.

(f) *Combined parent figure.* Thus the Orestes myth seems to represent less the Œdipean fantasy of the girl, than what might almost be called the pre-Œdipean<sup>1</sup> fantasy of the boy. Now fantasies of this kind seem to underly a very large class of myth in which a hero kills a female monster. But the presence of Œdipean factors can be detected whenever the monster has phallic attributes which prove her to be what Mrs. Klein has called the 'combined parent' figure. Thus Medusa, the Gorgon killed by Perseus, had snakes on her head instead of hair and was so terrible to look at that whosoever saw her was turned to stone; and in archaic art she was depicted with two other phallic symbols: great teeth and a lolling tongue.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pre-Œdipean fantasies are never found in a pure form in analysis. Nevertheless, it seems a justifiable inference that aggressive fantasies towards the mother must begin before the child can have any concept of his father—unless, indeed, such a concept is an hereditary endowment. <sup>2</sup> *Smith's Smaller Classical Dictionary*, 1898.

Perseus avoids the danger by looking at her reflection in his shield, and so cuts off her head, that is, castrates her. Having secured the head, he uses it to free Andromeda from another monster by turning it to stone, and so wins her as his bride. If we may assume, as I think we may, that the two episodes in the myth repeat the same unconscious fantasy, the parents appear twice over: first combined in the figure of the Gorgon, then separately as Andromeda and the sea monster. Indeed, the Œdipean theme occurs in five successive episodes; for Perseus, after killing the Gorgon and the sea monster, goes on to kill Andromeda's suitor Pheneus, his mother Danae's suitor Polydectus, and his grandfather Acrisius, who had tried to prevent his conception by confining Danae in her brazen tower.

We are now able to guess the unconscious meaning of the Sphinx. She is to Œdipus, what the Gorgon is to Perseus. Her phallic attributes are less obvious, but her true nature is betrayed by the riddle of the being with two legs and three legs and four legs. The original answer to the riddle, as Róheim argues from a number of parallels,<sup>1</sup> is probably not a man, but two people in the act of intercourse, symbolized by the Sphinx herself. The killing of the Sphinx and the Gorgon, therefore, are really distorted versions of myths like that of Cronus who castrates his father Uranus when he is in the act of intercourse with Gaea. This, fantastic as it sounds, is one of the favourite fantasies of the infantile unconscious.

The Brunhild of the Nibelung Saga seems to belong to the same category. The masculine woman who defeats all her suitors in various competitions, spear throwing, running, or whatever it may be, is the

<sup>1</sup> *The Riddle of the Sphinx*, 1934, p. 21.

phallic woman of unconscious fantasy, that is, the mother with the father's penis, or a combined figure of the father and mother in what analysts call the 'primal scene.' Only a hero like Siegfried can defeat her, that is castrate her, or the father combined with her, and so win her as a bride. But the Œdipean motive is more disguised than in the former parallels: Siegfried performs the feat, not for himself, but for king Gunther, who evidently stands for the impotent or castrated father.

Sara, in the legend of Tobias and the Angel, seems to be half-way between a phallic mother, like the Gorgon or Brunhild, and a purely feminine mother figure, like Jocasta or Andromeda, in the fully developed type of Œdipean myth. Sara is a sinister woman whose lovers all die on the first night. But eventually the demon husband who possessed her, and who had killed her former lovers, is forced to appear, that is, he becomes a separate entity; after which he is driven off, so that Tobias can marry Sara without danger. As in many myths, there are really two father figures, one good and one bad, the angel and the devil. The good father helps Tobias defeat the bad one.

(g) *Cannibalism and dismemberment.* Among the very earliest fantasies are two that are now receiving an increasing amount of attention in psycho-analytic work. These are concerned with cannibalism and dismemberment. In the period before the child has any control over his limbs, his mouth is the main organ by means of which he seeks to work his will upon the world. It is in this period that he builds fantasies of biting up, swallowing and dismembering his parents—fantasies which persist in his unconscious and find an echo in the fairy tales he hears, invents or



acts spontaneously in his play. Such themes are very common in archaic myths. Thus Cronus eats his children; his grandson Tantalus cuts up his son Pelops, cooks him and serves him up at a banquet of the gods. Tantalus's grandson Atreus kills his two nephews, mixes their blood with wine, and gives it to their father, his brother Thyestes, to drink. Cannibalistic stories of this kind occur all over the world and are clearly the product of the cannibalistic phase of individual development.

As to dismemberment, Frazer gives a formidable list of gods and heroes who perished in this way, for the purpose, he thinks, of stimulating the crops.<sup>1</sup> Set as well as Osiris was torn in pieces; so too, according to some accounts, was Romulus first king of Rome, Pentheus king of Thebes, and Lycurgus king of the Thracian Edonians. The two Greek kings may have died in the character of Dionysus, who, like Osiris, was torn limb from limb. We hear also of the dismemberment of several mythical heroes from other areas. The Norwegian king, Halfdan the Black, 'was cut up and buried in different parts of his kingdom for the sake of ensuring the fruitfulness of the earth.' And the body of Segera, a magician of Kiwai in New Guinea, was cut up and buried in different gardens to encourage the sago crop. In many legends, trees or animals spring up wherever the pieces are buried or the blood has dropped on the earth; and we learn from Frazer that a special virtue as a fertilizing agent resided in the genital organ. This association of fertility with dismemberment, both in myth and ritual, seems to reflect a common infantile theory of conception according to which the mother steals,

<sup>1</sup> *Golden Bough*, Ed. 3, vi, p. 98 *seq.*

takes away, or bites off, some part of the father, generally the phallus.<sup>1</sup>

These few examples should be enough to prove that in general myths, both in their original form as records of ritual and in their final form after their literary elaboration, are thinly disguised representations of certain fundamental types of unconscious fantasy well known to psycho-analysis. Certain problems remain; but we are at least in a position to answer some of the questions with which we started our investigation.

In the first place, we can understand why pre-Freudian mythologists from classical times onwards were so puzzled by what to them were immoral and irrational elements in myths, and why they took such pains to explain these elements away. The process by which unconscious material is disguised may be divided into two stages, the operation of which is often very clear in dreams. In the first stage, the unconscious material is made unintelligible by translation into symbols, by the reversal of roles or other modes of distortion. The result of this stage is usually an absurd and irrational picture, which seems to have no sense at all. In the second stage, this irrational picture is rationalized, elaborated into a consistent story, which, while retaining its original meaning to the unconscious, has an intelligible secondary meaning to the conscious mind. Now when a myth appears immoral this is because it is insufficiently distorted. The unconscious fantasy

<sup>1</sup> But it would be rash, as some authorities have done, to interpret every myth of dismemberment as a symbolic castration. Unconscious fantasy plays with a variety of mutilations, of which castration is the most important sub-group.

behind it is recognizable; but is repudiated by conscious thought. It is this type of myth which classical mythologists were always trying to explain away; that is, as Rank pointed out, they were trying to complete the process of distortion, which in other myths occurred before they reached their final written form. When, on the other hand, a myth appears irrational and absurd, this is because the process of distortion, which renders the unconscious fantasy unintelligible and innocuous, has not been covered up sufficiently by the process of secondary elaboration. In the Egyptian story of the two brothers, Anoupu and Bitiou, for example, the younger brother's guilt is repressed but his punishment remains, so that we are left with the absurd account of his castrating himself to prove his innocence.

In the second place, we can understand the strong emotional appeal of myths. To have a strong and universal appeal a story must satisfy at least three conditions. It must represent some fundamental unconscious fantasy, which is common to the greater part of mankind in every age and culture. It must be distorted sufficiently to satisfy conscious standards; yet it must be clear enough to be immediately intelligible to the unconscious. And it must have sufficient secondary elaboration to be free from those absurdities and irrationalities which would otherwise offend the conscious mind. The majority of Greek myths, in their classical form, satisfy these conditions perhaps more than those of any other people. For this reason they will remain for all time among the greatest treasures of the world.

So much for the psycho-analytical contribution to mythology as it was left—but for the addition of a

few details—by Abraham and Rank in 1909. But the connection between myths and ritual magic remains to be explained. Why is the dramatization of an unconscious fantasy believed to have a magical effect ? This is a problem to which we shall return.

## CHAPTER III

# EXOGENY, TOTEMISM AND TABOO

### I. EXOGENY

WE have seen, in the last chapter, how often primitive peoples, in their myths, impute incest to their gods, or to their ancestors in the heroic age. One might expect, therefore, to find the horror of incest much less among these people than among ourselves. The exact opposite seems to be the case. Among ourselves, where incest is indeed a criminal offence, it is punishable at most by imprisonment. Among primitive peoples, who often regard theft or murder as a virtue, incest is usually punishable by death.

The horror of incest is not only stronger, it also prohibits marriage with a wider group of relations, among savages than among ourselves. We may not marry our parents, our grandparents, our brothers and sisters, or our uncles and aunts. The savage may not, as a general rule, marry anyone of the same clan as himself. This—from our point of view—involves some curious anomalies: fifth or sixth cousins and even more distant relations in the same clan being ineligible, while there is often no ban on marriage with near relations in different clans, for example, with first cousins or even half-sisters.

Those who take it for granted that inbreeding is injurious to a species attribute the horror of incest either to an instinct or to intelligent legislation, and so marvel at the wisdom of nature or of man. There are serious objections to both views. In the first



place, there is no certain evidence that inbreeding is injurious, except where recessive genes carry a defect. Cleopatra was the product of generations of incestuous unions, yet her physical and mental qualities excited and still excite the admiration or envy of the world. In the second place, except among ourselves, the class of persons prohibited for marriage does not correspond at all closely with the class of blood relations. A half-sister may be eligible, while a tenth cousin and a mother-in-law (who may be no relation) are prohibited. But if the aim of the supposed instinct, or the legislation, were really to prevent inbreeding, one might expect that it would do so more efficiently.

In spite of these objections, which are not perhaps conclusive, Dr. Westermarck believes in an instinct against inbreeding, which, being derived from the principle that familiarity breeds contempt, makes us insensitive to the charms of those among whom we have been brought up. Now a tendency to find the sex appeal of strangers greater than that of those we already know is common enough in Europe and America, as divorce statistics prove. But this is more likely to be a neurotic symptom than an instinct. No instinct of the kind exists in animals, so that man is *a priori* unlikely to have evolved one; and if he had, it would not need the support of law.

That incest was prohibited as an eugenic measure is still more improbable. Savages are hardly likely to have observed undesirable consequences of inbreeding, the existence of which is still disputed by biologists. No, the undesirable consequences they fear are magical rather than natural. To them, incest brings famine, plague, and war; perhaps even a monstrosity, for example, with tusks like a

walrus.<sup>1</sup> But such monstrous products of incestuous unions are not weakly; indeed, in myths, they are often superior rather than inferior to other men. Thus the belief, common among civilized peoples, in the biological (as distinct from the magical) injuriousness of inbreeding is by no means primitive; and, since it is unsupported by the facts so far as they have been ascertained, it is itself in all probability an ancient superstition plausibly refurbished in pseudo-scientific garb. In other words, the belief in the injuriousness of incest is more likely to be the effect, than the cause, of the horror of incest it purports to explain.

As long as we regard the incest prohibition as natural, or rationalize it by supposing that it is beneficial to the species, it presents no real problem. The difficulty arises only when we begin to suspect that it has no biological utility. Does it, or did it ever, fulfil some other useful function? Or is it an irrational taboo?

McLennan suggested that female infanticide produced a shortage of women and caused men to hunt for wives outside their clan; Herbert Spencer that among proud and warlike savages marriage otherwise than by capture was considered shameful; and Lord Avebury that captured women were owned by their captors and therefore preferred to fellow clanswomen, who he supposed were once communally owned. According to all three theories, the incest prohibition is preserved by habit long after its original motive (shortage of clanswomen, preference for captured women to satisfy pride or desire for ownership, or whatever it may be) had gone. But

<sup>1</sup> This belief is held by the Aleuts. Lord Raglan, *Jocasta's Crime*, p. 13.

'while people' as Lord Raglan says 'often do things for stupid or insufficient reasons, they never do anything for no reason at all.'<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the theory that the incest prohibition is a functionless survival of marriage by capture is intrinsically improbable. Moreover, its three variants can claim little evidence in their support.

Lord Raglan's own theory is certainly original. Ritual incest between a divine king and his mother or sister was, as we know, once practised over a wide area, and believed essential to the fertility of men and beasts and herbs. The incest of laymen, he thinks, if I understand his argument correctly, was prohibited as a sacrilegious imitation of this rite. The opposition between sacred and sacrilegious incest is certainly remarkable. Both had magical effects: the practice of the one and the avoidance of the other were equally essential if fickle nature were not to withhold her gifts. But Lord Raglan's theory does not account for the origin of the beliefs on which he founds the incest ritual and taboo, nor for the continuance of the taboo after the decay of the beliefs.

Another theory, which, although now unpopular, takes us, I think, somewhere near the truth, is the Darwin-Atkinson<sup>2</sup> theory of the 'cyclopean' family. According to Darwin and Atkinson, primal man lived in small families each presided over by a jealous sire, who kept all the women to himself and exiled

<sup>1</sup> 'Customs are always dying out or becoming modified in a way which shows that people observe customs not merely because their fathers observed them, but also because they believe that some benefit accrues from their observance.' Lord Raglan, *Jocasta's Crime*, 1932, p. 43.

<sup>2</sup> Darwin, *Descent of Man*; Atkinson, *Primal Law*, 1903.

his adolescent sons. Incest was his prerogative; his sons were celibate until they could kill their father, or steal wives from some less well guarded group. In other words, they were compelled to be exogamous. This theory, although it is unlikely ever to be proved, explains the origin of the incest taboo plausibly enough; but not its continuation. As far as conscious motives are concerned, the modern savage avoids incest not because he is afraid of his father's jealousy, but because he is afraid of magical calamities, and of his kinsmen who will kill him to purify themselves from his crime.

The net result of the argument so far is to leave the problem of the incest prohibition apparently more insoluble than ever; and insoluble it remains as long as only conscious motives are considered. But here again psycho-analysis seems to provide a clue.

The psycho-analyst,<sup>1</sup> unlike his forerunners in this field, starts with the knowledge that unconscious incestuous impulses universally exist. His problem, therefore, is to explain how they are controlled.

The savage, as we saw, avoids incest because of certain superstitious fears. These fears are irrational enough; but they do duty for what the savage's civilized cousin calls his conscience. Indeed, the main difference between moral behaviour in the savage and in the civilized man is that the former has a much clearer idea than the latter of the supposed dangers of transgression. Whereas, for example, the savage may be afraid of being eaten by devils, the

<sup>1</sup> The following argument is based on Freud's *Totem und Tabu*, but, like Róheim, I lay more emphasis on endopsychic factors, and less on historical ones, than Freud does. Money-Kyrle, *The Meaning of Sacrifice*, 1930, pp. 188-94; Róheim, *The Riddle of the Sphinx*, Chapter IV.

civilized man is afraid of what he vaguely calls being 'bitten' by his conscience. We shall have more to say about such fears in the next chapter, when we are considering animism and magic. At the moment, however, it will be sufficient to introduce what may be called a first approximation to the psycho-analytic theory of the conscience.

The small child loves his parents, but also hates them when they thwart him, and fears them, partly because they really punish him, and more because he believes them to be as dangerous as he would be himself if he were their size. Both love and fear make him try to please them, checking some impulses and reversing others. At first perhaps he tries to please them only when they are present, but very soon when they are absent too. Even when he is alone he feels he is not alone; an ever-present eye is there to see, and a voice to praise or blame. Often, indeed, he may confess his secret sins because he feels that they are already known and cannot bear the suspense of an uncertain punishment. In other words, he has developed a conscience, or super-ego to give it its scientific name, which is henceforth in conflict with his crude impulses, called by analysts his *Id*.<sup>1</sup> Although the super-ego is derived from the child's parents—more particularly from the father, if the child is a boy—it is harsher, more exacting than they are, and soon becomes independent of them. It prevents him, as we know, from doing certain things he likes; but it also prevents many of his *Id* impulses reaching consciousness at all; so that he is, to a great extent, unaware of its

<sup>1</sup> Freud, *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*; *The Ego and the Id*. Or see: *A General Selection from the Works of Sigmund Freud*.



activity. Moreover, and this is the fundamental point, its action, except when conscious, is automatic and unintelligent. It represses not only those impulses which might really get him into trouble; but also many others which quite irrelevantly resemble, or symbolize, them. For instance, a child whose tendency to masturbation has incurred the special displeasure of his super-ego may be unable to play the piano because of an irrelevant resemblance between the two activities.

Now as we might expect, one of the chief functions of the super-ego is the repression of the erotic, and in particular the incestuous, impulses of the child. But it often overdoes its job. For instance, as a man he may be impotent with women he admires, because such women are unconsciously associated with his mother or sister.

There seems often to be an inverse correlation between the width of repression and its depth. In the normal civilized adult, the incestuous impulses of childhood are completely repressed. Incest is no conscious temptation, the idea of it is so foreign that it does not even excite exaggerated horror. But sexual desire towards persons outside the immediate family is not inhibited. Repression is deep, not wide. In many neurotics, on the other hand, repression is less complete. Incest is almost a conscious temptation, the idea of it is terrifying, arouses horror, indignation and the dread of undefinable calamities. Moreover, there is often some disturbance of normal desire towards persons who are unconsciously associated with members of the family. Repression is not deep, but is likely to be wide.

It is obvious that the primitive exogamist, with his exaggerated horror of incest and his large group of

prohibited relations, is very similar to this type of obsessional neurotic. In him also repression seems to be less deep than wide.

In one respect, however, the savage differs from the obsessional neurotic. The obsessional neurotic, or rather his super-ego, produces its own fantastic inhibitions. The savage finds his taboos determined for him by the society in which he lives. No doubt in savage communities, individuals differ from each other (though probably less than among ourselves). Some may be what we should call normal, and only obey the exaggerated prohibitions of their clan because they are afraid of the natural consequences of disobedience. To the majority, however, the supernatural consequences are probably the more alarming. They are neurotic, and would evolve fantastic inhibitions of their own, even if there were no prohibitions as a model. They differ from civilized neurotics only in that their taboos are 'institutionalized,' so that they are saved the trouble of inventing taboos of their own.

One of the institutions that among savages determine the direction in which the super-ego will irrationally expand its influence is the classificatory system of relationship. A man has one name for his sisters, his mother's sister's daughters, his maternal grandmother's daughter's daughters, in fact for all his matrilineal female autho-cousins. All these women are sisters and sexually taboo. He must never treat them with familiarity, and may have to avoid them altogether. Similarly, he has one name for his mother, her sisters and female autho-cousins. These women are also, as a general rule, taboo; but perhaps less strictly since they belong to an older age group and the risk of intercourse is

accordingly less. He has one name for his cross-cousins, his mother's brother's daughters and such relations. These women are eligible for marriage or flirtation, with the possible exception of cross-cousins of the first degree.

The usual rule is that women belonging to the same clan as himself are sexually taboo. His 'sisters' naturally belong to it; so do his 'mothers' if, as is usually the case, clan membership descends in the female line. On the other hand, his mother-in-law belongs to a different clan, and is not tabooed by the exogamic rule. But intercourse with her (except in those rare cases when it is obligatory) is prevented by a special system of avoidances. The women he must avoid flirting with or marrying—his classificatory mothers, sisters and mothers-in-law—are all, therefore, appropriate symbols of his real mother and sisters.

Sometimes marriage between alternate generations is prohibited. Then a man has four groups of relations to consider. In one group, differing in age and clan from his own, are his possible mothers-in-law and his classificatory daughters—that is, in a system of matrilineal descent. In another group, differing in age but not in clan from his own, are his classificatory mothers and his classificatory sisters' daughters. In a third group, his own, are his sisters and autho-cousins and their maternal grandmothers and granddaughters. Women in all these three groups are sexually taboo. Only the fourth group, similar in age but different in clan from his own, contains his possible wives, that is, his cross-cousins, and their maternal grandmothers and granddaughters. The effect of this system is to prevent a man marrying not only his classificatory

mothers and sisters (who belong to his clan and are prohibited in a two-class matrilineal system) but also his classificatory daughters (who belong to a different clan).

It seems to me incontestable that the primary unconscious object of such systems is to avoid intercourse with women who symbolize a mother or sister.<sup>1</sup> But it must not be supposed that all tabooed women are necessarily such symbols. Professor Radcliffe Brown has shown that certain taboos logically necessitate others. In the complicated eight-class system, for example, a certain type of cross-cousin may be taboo, not because she symbolizes anyone in particular, but because free contact with her would put a man in the embarrassing position of frequently meeting someone else with whom she frequently associated, for example, a classificatory mother-in-law.

We are now in a position to re-examine the Darwin-Atkinson (Cyclopean) theory of exogamy. It is plausible enough to suppose that eoanthropic, like gorilla, fathers kept their daughters for themselves, and so forced their sons to seek mates elsewhere. At this time, we may suppose, the human infancy period of dependence was still too short to produce an effective super-ego. There was no conscience to support the father, whose authority depended solely on his presence and his strength. When his back was turned his sons, no doubt, flirted with his wives, as young baboons do as often as they can.<sup>2</sup> And when he grew old and weak, he was, no doubt, killed or driven off. But as the infancy period lengthened and children became

<sup>1</sup> Freud, *Totem and Taboo, The Fear of Incest*.

<sup>2</sup> Zuckerman, *Social Life of Monkeys and Apes*.

more helplessly dependent upon their parents,<sup>1</sup> the parental authority must have tended more and more to be incorporated or 'introjected' as an endo-psychic force. In other words, the inhibitions of super-egos came more and more to replace the prohibitions of actual parents, in particular, of fathers, who at the same time became less ruthless because, in their childhood, they had begun to develop super-egos of their own. Thus the cyclopean family in which incest was the father's prerogative—something forbidden only to the sons—gave place to the exogamic clan in which both generations were equally subject to the incest taboo in an extended form. The super-egos of the clansmen, sometimes objectified as gods or demons, ruled in the primal father's stead.

Thus the cyclopean theory, as revised by Freud, not only provides a function for the incest taboo, but also explains its survival long after this function had become unconscious. Its original function was to protect a man's wives against his sons. Its present function, which is unconscious, is to protect the family and clan against the jealousies which would otherwise disrupt them.<sup>2</sup> But what was once a conscious prohibition is maintained, in the form of

<sup>1</sup> J. R. de la H. Marett has suggested that, as the infancy period lengthened, natural selection may have favoured a prolongation and intensification of the feminine homosexual component in the young males, without which they might have challenged their fathers before they were full grown and so decreased their chance of survival. *Race, Sex and Environment*, 1936, pp. 39, 242-4.

<sup>2</sup> And also to preserve and protect the unconscious and internal image of the 'Good Parent.'



an apparently irrational taboo, not by a conscious appreciation of its function, but by super-egos which inhibit blindly whatever tradition prohibits so long as this is also an apt symbol of a repressed desire.

One obvious problem, however, remains unsolved. Why was the ritual break of the incest taboo believed, throughout the ancient world, to be necessary to the welfare of mankind? This problem has already confronted us in the chapter on myths; and we shall come back to it again. In the meantime, we may consider totemism, which is often connected with exogamy.

## 2. TOTEMISM

A totem is a species of animal or plant with which a savage clan identifies itself, which it usually protects and from which it believes itself to be descended. Thus the men of a kangaroo clan say that they are kangaroos, that kangaroos are their brothers and that they are descended from kangaroos, whose mythical adventures they repeat in their rites. Moreover, they protect kangaroos and only eat them on rare occasions. Totemism and exogamy are sometimes found independently of each other; but as a rule they are associated, the totem clan being the exogamic unit: kangaroos neither kill each other nor intermarry.

There are several problems here for classical anthropology. Why should men believe themselves to be descended from kangaroos? Why should they abstain from kangaroo meat? Why should not they marry other descendants of kangaroos?

No less than six theories of the origin of totemism are summarized and discussed by Sir James Frazer in his *Totemism and Exogamy*. According to Herbert

Spencer, the belief in animal descent is derivable from the misunderstanding of nicknames, savages who believe themselves descended from lions, for example, being in reality descended from a man named lion because he was strong or brave. Dr. Wilkin, on the other hand, found in the belief in transmigration of souls a satisfactory solution of the problem, the lion ancestor being in reality a man whose soul is reincarnate in a lion. Another theory, Dr. Haddon's, based on totemic myths in which the ancestors of totemites regularly break their own taboos and eat their totems, is that these ancestors were originally named after their staple article of diet. Three more theories were proposed, at different times, by Sir James himself. Thus he has successively derived totemism from the belief that a man's external soul resides in animals; from fertility rites practised in Central Australia for multiplying totems, each clan apparently abstaining from the free enjoyment of a certain food in order to increase it for their neighbours; and from the sick fancies of pregnant women, who, in Central Australia, believe that whatever last attracted their attention before they realized their pregnancy is an ancestral spirit which has decided to be reborn.

Of these six theories, Herbert Spencer's, Haddon's and Frazer's second theory, at least in its crude form, are rationalizations which collapse at the first critical assault, as Frazer himself has shown. The savage is not so stupid as to mistake nicknames for realities, nor so altruistic as to abstain from certain kinds of food solely in order magically to increase it for his neighbours. The other three theories are plausible enough. But since they derive totemism, or the belief in animal kinship and descent, from

various forms of the belief that animals can contain, or be, the souls of people, they merely shift the problem and do not solve it.

Now a sense of man's kinship with animals, which is the essence of totemism, is not confined to savages. Civilized children have it too, and Freud<sup>1</sup> was the first to point the parallel. Many children, at some stage in their development, pass through what can only be described as a totemic phase. Some animal, a bear for instance, becomes of enormous importance. At night, the child is terrified of bears and is quite sure that one is lurking under his bed. In the day time, his favourite game is to be a bear himself. This alternation between phobia and identification is typical. The child imitates the animal he is afraid of.

Many children with such peculiarities have been analysed, and, in every case, the explanation is found to be the same. The animal is a symbol of one of his parents, or of both of them together—not of his real parents as he has come to know them, but of those omnipotent and terrifying parents of his unconscious fantasy. Hence his admiration, and his fear.

The savage does not seem to have any phobia of his totem; but otherwise his attitude towards it is similar to that of the child. He identifies himself with it, he imitates it in his rites, and he treats it with ambivalence, usually protecting it but sometimes eating it as a ritual. In short, his behaviour suggests that to him also it is a symbol of the parents of his unconscious fantasy—parents whom he admires and imitates, fears and tries to please, and to whose help he looks in time of trouble. When further we remember that, in his view, he is descended from, or is

<sup>1</sup> *Totem and Taboo. The infantile return of Totemism.*

perhaps even a reincarnation of, a totemic ancestor, our supposition seems to be confirmed. Indeed, the Central Australian himself tells us that it was his totem who entered his mother at his conception<sup>1</sup>—a statement that symbolically admits a repressed knowledge of paternity and identifies his totem as his father.<sup>2</sup>

Thus the totem is a symbol of the parents, in particular of the father, to both the savage and the child. But whereas to the child the totem is an individual product, to the savage it is a social institution. The choice of totem is determined for the child by some accidental circumstance; for the savage, by the tradition of his clan.<sup>3</sup>

Freud's interpretation of the unconscious meaning of a totem (or perhaps it would be safer to say one of

<sup>1</sup> This belief is the basis of Frazer's third theory, namely that totemism is a product of the sick fancies of pregnant women.

<sup>2</sup> Children who have not been taught the 'facts of life' nevertheless always seem to possess some vague unconscious knowledge of the relation between their parents combined with a belief that in some sense they 'incorporate' their fathers. That savages can ever fail to possess at least this degree of unconscious knowledge and belief—even when they deny all conscious knowledge of the father's role in procreation—is hardly credible. See Ernest Jones, *Mother-Right and the Sexual Ignorance of Savages*, and his review of Malinowski's *Sex and Repression in Primitive Society* (*International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, VI, 123, and IX, 364-73). Róheim, 'Coming into Being' (*British Journal of Medical Psychology*, 1938).

<sup>3</sup> It may descend either in the paternal or in the maternal line, or be determined by the 'totem place' where his mother was when she first recognized her pregnancy.

its unconscious meanings) at once explains three of the chief peculiarities of totemism: the belief in totemic descent, and the taboos on killing the totem and marrying a fellow totemite. For if the totem is a father symbol,<sup>1</sup> the belief in totemic descent is a symbolic truth; and the two crimes prevented by the two taboos are symbolic parricide and incest.

Had Freud been content with these results, his contribution to anthropology would, I think, have been far more generally accepted. But he went on to construct, upon anthropological premises that have subsequently been questioned, a far more ambitious theory, which is moreover difficult to understand and offensive to deep prejudices. For this reason, perhaps, the critics of Freud's main thesis are over ready to believe that it has collapsed with some of its weaker foundations. Nevertheless, when carefully and sympathetically examined, its main structure is found to be intact. And ultimately, I think, it will be recognized as a landmark in anthropology.

Freud published *Totem and Tabu* in 1913. At that time several leading anthropologists believed totemism to have been once universal, and an early stage in the development of all religions. The totems of savages, the theriomorphic gods (e.g. of Egypt) and the gods to whom certain animals are sacred (e.g. Jahveh with his Pascal Lamb) were assumed, too readily perhaps, to be three stages in a unilinear progress. The most brilliant exponent of this view

<sup>1</sup> It may be objected that in matrilineal descent if a man's totem symbolizes anyone this would be more likely to be his maternal uncle (who has the same totem) than his father (who has a different one). But his maternal uncle, under whose care and authority he is brought up, is already a father symbol to him.



was Robertson Smith, who in his *Religion of the Semites* set out to reconstruct the origin and development of sacrificial rites. The sacrifice of a sacred animal to a god was not originally, he argued, a mere act of homage or even a rite to secure divine favour, but a sacrifice of a theriomorphic god. And he concluded that such divine victims were originally totems, and that the sacrifice of totems was once the central feature of the totemic cult.

This sweeping generalization, which seemed to reduce so much to one simple formula, was taken up with zeal—especially perhaps by anti-clerical anthropologists in France who may have welcomed it as a means to ridicule the faithful. Much circumstantial evidence was soon unearthed in its support; but for a long time the nearest approach to the supposed totemic rite remained an Arab sacrifice described by Nilus in the fourth century, and already quoted by Robertson Smith himself. The Bedouins of the Sinai desert bound a camel on a rough altar of stones. The chief led his followers three times, singing, round the altar, gave the animal the first wound and eagerly drank the gushing blood. Then all the clansmen fell to with their swords, hacking pieces off, and devouring the raw flesh with such haste that in the short period between the appearance of the morning star and dawn, everything—flesh, bones, skin and entrails, was consumed.

There is little doubt that this gruesome rite is derived from the same source as the Jewish Passover and the Christian Eucharist; but for a long time there was no evidence of a totemic origin of sacrifice. The Ainu of Japan, indeed, used to bring up bear cubs, which were suckled by their own women and almost worshipped, in order in the end to eat them

in a kind of orgy, amid prayers and lamentations of regret. But the Ainu, whatever they may have been in the past, are not true totemites. Then at last, Spencer and Gillen discovered that the Central Australians occasionally eat their totems in their sacred rites, and Robertson Smith's forecast seemed to be confirmed. The eating of the witchety grub by the witchety grub totemites seemed the first link in a long chain which ended in the Eucharist.

But rites are often easier to reconstruct than to explain. Even if—which now seems improbable—the chain is really in one piece, and not in several pieces, which may or may not radiate from a common centre, there is still the problem why it should be there at all. That people have often killed and eaten their gods is certain. But why? According to Robertson Smith, in order to stress their unity with him and with each other. According to Frazer, in order to secure the fertility of nature. These have assuredly been motives; but one feels there must be other motives that are both deeper and more intelligible.

Freud accepted Robertson Smith's theory that a communal eating of the totem was once the central rite of totemism and the origin of sacrifice in general, and added to it his own discovery that the totem could symbolize the father. Thus the origin of religious sacrifice became symbolic parricide. His next step was to compare this symbolic parricide with the actual parricide that, according to Darwin and Atkinson, brought each successive cyclopean family to an end.

Consider the similarities between these two theoretical reconstructions: the Darwin-Atkinson cyclopean family, and the Robertson Smith totem clan.

In the former, incest is prohibited by the jealousy of the primal father. In the latter, endogamy, or incest between the children of the totem ancestor, is tabooed for no apparent reason—except that supernatural calamities to the whole clan are supposed to follow any infringement, so that the clansmen themselves in self-protection exact the direst penalties from a culprit. In the former, the brothers unite and slay the primal father in order to take his wives. In the latter, the clansmen, though usually honouring and protecting their totem, occasionally unite and kill it for no very obvious reason—except that by eating it they incorporate its mystic virtue.

In the two cases, the behaviour, that is, the avoidance of incest or endogamy, and the killing of the primal father or the totem, is almost identical. But the conscious motives are very different. In the cyclopean family, the motive for the incest avoidance and the parricide are the respective jealousies of the primal father and his sons. In the totem clan, the conscious motives are to avoid supernatural calamity and to incorporate virtue, to promote fertility or some purpose of this kind. When, however, unconscious factors are taken into account, even the motives become similar. Something closely analogous to the primal father is present in the totem clan: namely, an endopsychic force, the super-ego, which is perhaps identified with the totem, as it is in higher religions with the god. In a sense, therefore, the primal father is still there to forbid incest and to be periodically killed. The conflict remains; but it is endopsychic rather than external.

Significantly enough, the endogamic taboo is sometimes temporarily suspended during orgies

which follow funerary and sacrificial rites. Unlike the real father, however, the super-ego is an endopsychic force which cannot be permanently destroyed.

Having drawn these parallels, Freud concluded that the totem clan developed from the cyclopean family by a process that may be summarized as follows: After killing their father, the brothers of the primal horde quarrelled among themselves, since no one of them was strong enough to take his place and reap the fruits of victory. This disappointment awakened their sense of guilt; they regretted their deed and wished to undo it. Therefore they instituted exogamy and totemism. In other words, they renounced the women for whom they had killed their father; and they renounced the flesh of certain animals which symbolized, and were perhaps believed to reincarnate, him. But in the totem sacrament they commemorated and repeated their crime.

Freud himself admitted that his theory, or rather allegory, condenses into a single generation a process that must have taken many thousand. This means, I take it, that in Freud's opinion the practice of killing fathers became gradually less frequent, and the duration of the taboos and rituals following each murder gradually longer. If so, there must have been a period in which the cyclopean family alternated with the exogamic clan. After killing one father the conscience-stricken sons would continue for a time to honour his theriomorphic ghost and avoid his wives. But sooner or later they quarrelled and split into cyclopean families again.

There is nothing, I think, inherently improbable in this supposition. The difficulty begins when we

try to explain the survivals of the taboos and rituals thousands of years after the last cyclopean father is supposed to have been slain. All customs tend to cease when there is no motive, conscious or unconscious, to preserve them. Therefore the so-called 'totemic sacrament' cannot be a mere 'repetition and commemoration' of a primal crime. But if the totem is a father symbol, the motives are not hard to guess. On the one hand, there is the unconscious wish to be the father, to kill him and take his place. On the other, is the fear of the super-ego, which checks these revolutionary desires. The result is a compromise. The father's symbolic wives, the women of the same totemic clan, are avoided. The symbolic father, the totem, is honoured and protected. But in a ritual ceremony, in which all the clansmen share the guilt, he is slain and eaten; his sons identify themselves with him in the most primitive and literal manner by incorporating his flesh.

If this is an adequate explanation of totemic rituals and taboos, what becomes of the primal crime? That the mutual jealousy between sons and fathers, now found mainly in the unconscious, was once conscious and a frequent cause of murder remains extremely probable. But an actual primal murder ceases to be a necessary cause of exogamy and totemism, which may, and indeed must, be explained in terms of endopsychic conflict.

Another, and to most anthropologists more vital, objection to this theory of Freud's is that it is built on theories that are themselves unproved. Not only is the existence of the cyclopean family uncertain, the 'totemic sacrifice' itself may be the end-product of a local cult, not the ancestral form of religious sacrifice in general. Possibly the ancestors



of the white and yellow races were never even totemites at all.

I have already argued that a Freudian theory of totemism can be built on other foundations than the cyclopean family. I shall now try to show that a Freudian theory of sacrifice can be built as easily on a multilinear as on a unilinear theory of the development of religion.

The ritual eating of a witchety grub in Australia, of a camel in the Sinai desert, the ritual dismemberment of a divine king in Egypt or Greece, may represent, as Robertson Smith might have thought, three stages in a continuous development. But they may equally represent three end products of cults which may have diverged from a common origin, or may even have originated independently of each other. The psycho-analytical anthropologist need have no opinion on such questions. He can infer, often with some certainty, the unconscious motives behind a given rite without any knowledge of its actual history. He can infer, for instance, that the witchety grub, the camel and the divine king are all father symbols (though they very possibly symbolize something else as well). If the symbol is eaten, one motive, conscious or unconscious, must be to usurp the father's place, to become him, to incorporate his strength. If what is eaten is believed to bring fertility, this must symbolize more particularly the father's phallic power. If, on the other hand, the dismembered fragments are not eaten but scattered abroad as a magical manure, it must be this same phallic power which is given to earth, the mother goddess, that she may conceive and bring forth her fruits.

A vast number of myths, many of them of Œdipean form, seem to record sacrifices of this kind. I shall be

content with describing only one. According to the Fan tribe of Africa, their sacrificial rites were founded by Ngurangurane, to honour the death of his father Ombure, the Giant Crocodile, whom he had slain with the aid of his mother's magic. When Ngurangurane had killed his father, he cut him in pieces, ate the brains and heart himself, gave the best parts to the old men, and the entrails to the women and children. Everyone had to eat some part, so that when Ombure's ghost came for vengeance he found everywhere his own flesh and was powerless. Then Ngurangurane made the people mourn Ombure for thirty times thirty days and sing his praises. Lastly he ordered the sacrifice of a man and a woman in his father's honour.<sup>1</sup>

At first sight, this looks almost like a traditional record of Freud's primal parricide, especially when we learn that one of the chief complaints against Ombure was that he demanded too many women for himself. More probably, however, it is a record of an Œdipean ritual in which a divine king personated a crocodile and was slain by the son who succeeded to his unenviable title. The idea that the tribesmen had to protect themselves against Ombure's vengeance by eating him betrays the unconscious fear and guilt which the killing of gods, even for the best of conscious motives, is certain to arouse.

Whether or not such ritual parricides are derived from, and historically continuous with, Freud's primal parricide remains an open question. They are certainly dramatizations of the Œdipean fantasies of those who took part in them. We shall come

<sup>1</sup> Róheim, *Australian Totemism*, pp. 131-2, from Trille, *Le Totemisme chez les Fan*, pp. 184-202.

back to them once more, in the next chapter, in order to examine their supposed magical effects.

### 3. TABOO<sup>1</sup>

The sexual prohibitions against incest and endogamy, and the nutritional prohibition against eating the totem, discussed in the last two sections, are special forms of that general system of avoidances known as taboo.

A person, thing, place or action, may be taboo; for instance, a chief and his possessions, the place where anyone is buried, or the act of intercourse before an expedition for hunting or war. A tabooed person or object is sacred or unclean—two concepts that are combined in primitive thought—that is, in some way thought to be charged with a dangerous power like electricity. Anyone who breaks a taboo risks the most fearful calamities. He may waste away slowly, or die immediately as if he had been struck by lightning. In the Old Testament, the Ark of the Covenant was in danger of falling while being carried in a cart. Uzzah stretched out his hand to save it and was immediately struck dead. 'How unfair of Jahveh!' one is inclined to think. But to the ancient Jews, the result was as inevitable as if Uzzah had touched the live rail in the tube. Sometimes, indeed, the kinsmen of a taboo breaker, or the priests, anticipate the supernatural vengeance by killing themselves. Nevertheless, he may often escape the consequences of his act if he observes certain rites of purification. These usually include washing.

<sup>1</sup> The argument here is for the most part derived from Freud, *Totem and Taboo*, *The Taboo and the Ambivalence of Emotional Excitations*.

A taboo is contagious. Any person, or thing, who touches a tabooed object becomes himself taboo. For instance, a Maori chief, who is taboo, cannot blow on a fire without endangering his subjects. Death would swiftly overtake anyone who ate of the food that was cooked in the pot that was boiled in the fire that was blown on by the dangerous and sacred breath of the chief.

Taboos may be permanent or temporary. Priests, chiefs and the dead are permanently taboo; so is everything that belongs to them. Persons are temporarily taboo when they are in certain conditions: a woman during menstruation, or childbirth; a man before or after an expedition for war, hunting or fishing, etc.

In short, savages subject themselves to a great number of restrictions, some important, some trivial. They do not know the cause or ask the reason; but they are convinced that dire punishment will overtake any infringement, whether intentional or accidental. Indeed, so great is the fear that no savage in his natural state would ever break a taboo on purpose. If he breaks it accidentally he will often sicken and die from sheer terror and depression.

Strange as a primitive system of taboos may seem to the European, there is little doubt that his own ancestors were once ruled by a similar system, and that the moral code he is brought up on is derived from it. Yet we must beware, in admitting an essential similarity between morals and taboos, lest we come to ignore the equally essential differences between them. In the first place, morals are on the whole more rational. If stealing were not generally felt to be immoral, we should each try to acquire our neighbours' goods by methods other than those

sanctioned by our economic system. But the advantages of this freedom would be more than counter-balanced by the disadvantages of the similar freedom of our neighbours. Although many of our morals are, of course, irrational, on the whole they represent a selection of the most rational of our ancestors' taboos.

In the second place, morals, except among agnostics, are felt to have the sanction of the gods. The taboo breaker, on the other hand, seems often to be punished by his own act alone—like the unwary mechanic who touches a high-tension cable. Sometimes, it is true, demons punish him; but more often the dangerous emanation, or *mana*, which inheres in the tabooed object, is itself fatal, unless removed by purification. Perhaps we can distinguish three stages in the development of moral sanctions. They are maintained, in the first by *mana*, a supernatural force which is in some way animate yet impersonal; in the second, by devils; and in the third, by gods.<sup>1</sup> Wundt associated the splitting of the concept taboo into two distinct concepts of sacred and unclean with the transformation of taboos or morals from the sphere of demons to that of gods.

Although civilized people, as a whole, have advanced from the stage of taboos to that of morals, there are some who revert to the stage of taboos. These, as Freud has pointed out,<sup>2</sup> are the obsessional

<sup>1</sup> As Kant has pointed out, people who behave well because they like doing so, because they genuinely sympathize with others, are not moral. If such behaviour should ever become general, morals will have been out-grown and have become superfluous.

<sup>2</sup> *Totem and Taboo*, pp. 43-4.



neurotics. Like taboos, obsessional avoidances spread out from one object to another. A Maori commoner cannot touch food out of a pot heated in a fire blown on by the breath of a chief. A patient of Freud could not tolerate in her house an object bought by her husband from a shop in a street having the same name as a former friend, living in a distant town, who had become 'impossible' to her. And lastly, like taboos, compulsive avoidances have no conscious motive. The most a patient can say is that an infringement would, in some way, endanger some person in his environment; in any case, it would produce intolerable anxiety.

Now the mechanisms underlying obsessional neurosis are fairly well understood. According to Freud's classical theory—which to-day would be regarded as true, though perhaps no longer complete—the avoidance, or taboo, is the converse of an unconscious desire. In early childhood there was a strong desire to touch or do something, which was repressed and counteracted by a compulsive avoidance. The unconscious desire then seeks new outlets, which symbolize those which are inhibited. But the avoidance spreads over these also, so that yet other outlets must be found. This process of substitute formation and inhibition continues, each new outlet being blocked in turn, until it involves a host of harmless objects or actions. The final result is so like a primitive system of taboos that one must suppose the underlying mechanisms to be similar. The savage is, indeed, an obsessional neurotic; but whereas his civilized brother has to invent symptoms for himself, the savage finds his symptoms ready made in the traditional system of taboos.

To sum up: taboos in general, of which the

prohibitions against endogamy and the killing of totems are particular examples, are institutionalized forms of obsessional avoidances against the symbolic satisfaction of repressed and unconscious desires. But this explanation, convincing as it is, is not quite complete. It does not account for the role of that supernatural fluid, or *mana* to give it one of its many names, which inheres in tabooed objects and strikes the taboo breaker dead. We must, then, take up the trail again in the next chapter, on animism and magic.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANIMISM, MAGIC AND RELIGION

#### I. ANIMISM

IN every age and every culture, man has created supernatural beings in his own image, by whom he feels himself to be either encompassed or possessed. Several categories may be distinguished. Even an ordinary totem is, in a sense, a supernatural being, for its thoughts and feelings are supposed to be similar to those of men. Moreover, like its human brother, it is a reincarnation, in a weaker form, of a totemic ancestor. As to totemic ancestors themselves, they were, during their lives, capable of assuming both animal and human form; they made mountain ranges, creeks or other natural features; and they are the subject of cults in which their wanderings and mighty deeds are dramatized. Therefore they almost deserve the name of gods.

The half-human, half-animal gods of Egypt and other places resemble these totemic ancestors in many ways. The relation between an Egyptian god and the whole species of animal sacred to him is similar to that between the ancestral totem and the totem species. Such resemblances certainly suggest that all gods to whom species of animals are sacred were originally totems, or at least that both are derived from a common source. But an independent origin and parallel development is always an alternative possibility.<sup>1</sup> At any rate, a vast number of

<sup>1</sup> Since, as we have already seen, our own children

ancient gods, both among Aryans and Semites, were animals, or at least have characteristics that strongly suggest an animal if not a totemic origin. To this category belong all gods who are half-animals, or associated with sacred animals, or to whom special animals are sacrificed. Thus, for example, there is little doubt that Zeus, who is an amalgamation of several different deities, is derived from the various animals sacrificed to him, or in whose likeness he sometimes indulged in his amours. In this respect, he resembles his more serious and successful rival, Jahveh of the Old Testament, who is thought to have started his career not only as a Ram and a Bull,<sup>1</sup> but possibly also as a Boar—since the flesh of pigs is taboo, that is sacred or unclean.<sup>2</sup>

But Zeus (and Jahveh who was also a volcano) had other forms. He was an oak tree, the thunderbolt and the sky. He seduced Danae disguised as a shower of golden rain quite as easily as he seduced Europa and Leda in the likeness of a bull or swan. Therefore his origins include some that are not theriomorphic. He is derived not only from divine bulls and swans, but also from the Thunderer who ruled the sky. In this aspect he belongs to another category of gods and goddesses, cosmic in their immensity, personifications of the sky, the earth, the ocean, the sun and moon and stars. Such beings indeed were often conceived to be in animal form, or fused with other

often spontaneously, and without the influence of any traditional cult, project their feelings upon animals and identify them with their unconscious pictures of their parents.

<sup>1</sup> Reik, *Probleme der Religionspsychologie*, Das Schofar, 1919.

<sup>2</sup> According to Solomon Reinach the pig was originally a Hebrew totem, *Orpheus*, 1909, p. 181.

animal gods; but from the beginning they were probably also thought of as superhuman men and women.

Whether or not such superhuman men and women are deified ancestors or rulers, as Herbert Spencer thought, is another question. We know that the Cæsars were gods, first after and then before their death; and some of our modern dictators—both nationalist and communist—seem likely to enjoy similar promotions. We know too that ancestors were worshipped in Rome and other places, and are still worshipped in China and Japan. Therefore many anthropomorphic gods were once mortals who have undergone apotheosis. But others may quite likely have been imaginary from the beginning.

Many of the most important human gods were not so much individuals as a whole series of individuals, dynasties, perhaps, of sacrificial victims.<sup>1</sup> The Egyptian Pharaoh was the son of the god Osiris during his life, and after death became Osiris. He had therefore to play this rôle in a series of divine comedies, which in prehistoric times seem to have been enacted in grim earnest. The early form of these comedies, or rather tragedies, remains uncertain, but the following reconstruction may be fairly near the truth. At his conception his father played the part of Osiris and his mother that of Isis-Hathor, the divine cow. When full grown he probably assisted at the sacrifice of his father, the living god, and succeeded to his father's throne and queens—unless, as sometimes may have happened, he perished himself to prolong his father's life. In the end, perhaps after some of his own sons had been sacrificed in his place, he was in his turn dismembered,

<sup>1</sup> Frazer, *Golden Bough*.



henceforth to rule in the underworld as lord of the dead. If the myth of Osiris is any guide, his limbs were collected and embalmed. His life history is typical of that of divine kings in general whose ritual marriage and death were believed necessary for the welfare of their people.

Such a king was both son of god and father of god: god the son during his life and god the father after he was slain.<sup>1</sup> His queen was usually his sister, who after his early death, was possibly married to his son. But, in any case, since she personated the same goddess as her predecessor, she was her husband's mother in fiction if not in fact. Indeed, since he was identified with their father, she was not only god's wife, sister and mother, but his daughter too.

Another class of supernatural beings is that of devils. Sometimes, indeed, the distinction between gods and devils is purely relative, the devils of one people being merely the gods of their neighbours. Thus the wicked Set who slew Osiris was the patron deity of a provincial town in Egypt; Beelzebub was simply a competitor of Jahveh, and the Christian Satan was the Roman god Saturn. But though some devils acquired their devilry, or had it thrust upon them, many were born diabolic. These are not fallen gods, and their species probably existed long before there were any gods to fall.

A belief in demons can coexist with totemism and does not seem to be derived from it. In Central Australia, according to Róheim,<sup>2</sup> totemism is the official religion of initiated men. But everyone

<sup>1</sup> The Pharaoh was identified with Horus son of Osiris during his life.

<sup>2</sup> *The Riddle of the Sphinx*, 1934, p. 24.

believes in demons; and for this and other reasons, Róheim supposes them to be older than the cult of totems. The most common type of demon, to be met in Australia, in India, in ancient and medieval Europe, in fact all over the world, is a distorted human being, or sometimes an animal, often with enormous genitals, whose chief characteristic is a supernatural capacity to seduce the unwary of both sexes. Such, for instance, were the fauns and satyrs of classical legend, the female succubi of medieval Europe, and the *alknarintja* women of Central Australia to-day.

These several categories of supernatural beings—totems, theriomorphic and anthropomorphic gods and devils—are a challenge to all who believe in the rationality of man. To the nineteenth century, there was no doubt about the question to be asked; nor about the kind of answer to be expected. How could the savage, assuming him to be unversed in science but otherwise rational enough, come to such beliefs? They must be plausible inferences from insufficient data. In some such terms as these, Tylor, the father of modern anthropology, framed his problem. His first step was to reduce the various types of supernatural being to one, which, he thought, must be the ghost or soul. The ghost of a departed man might be good or bad, and, if exceptionally powerful, would in course of time become a god or devil. Moreover he might retain his original shape, or be reincarnated in an animal and so become a theriomorphic god or devil or totem. Tylor's next step was to explain the ghost or soul. This, he thought, must be derived from the experience of dreams in which the sleeper appears to leave his body and visit distant places, or receives visits

from his friends and relations some of whom are dead.<sup>1</sup>

An explanation so simple and comprehensive must, one feels, contain a large amount of truth. But since Tylor's day we have ceased to take the dream itself for granted. The dream does not so much create beliefs as give expression (usually more or less distorted) to unconscious wishes that are already there. To take the simplest case, in which there is little or no distortion, one may dream of one's dead father because one's unconscious has refused to admit his death. Dreams may rationalize and make conscious an unconscious belief; they do not create it. Therefore, in this case at least, man's irrationality, his determination to believe what he wishes to believe, is a cause of dreams and cannot be explained away as one of their effects. (This illustrates the difference between the rationalist and psycho-analytic attitudes. To the rationalist, superstition pertains to savages alone, in whom it may be excused because of lack of knowledge. To the psycho-analyst, we are all irrational in the sense that we all have unconscious superstitions—though some of us, more or less successfully, try to prevent them from influencing our conscious thoughts).

Another difficulty in Tylor's dream theory is that souls and ghosts do not, as he thought, by any means exhaust the supernatural realm. Animism is concerned with spirits, be they gods, devils, ghosts or souls, that is, with supernatural personalities. But there are also supernatural forces that are impersonal, and which belong to Dr. Marett's category of 'pre-animism' or 'animatism'.<sup>2</sup> Among savages

<sup>1</sup> Tylor, *Primitive Culture*, 1874. For a summary of Tylor's work see R. R. Marett, *Tylor*, 1936.

<sup>2</sup> R. R. Marett, *The Threshold of Religion*, 1909, p. 5.

all over the world one meets the concept of *mana*. This is a mystic power, life, will, or soul-fluid, which resides in or radiates from certain persons or objects. It is thus a kind of supernatural electric charge or ray. It is transferred by contact from one person or object to another. It resides in chiefs and sorcerers, and in their weapons, in the dead and in whoever has touched a corpse, in tombs, shrines, temples and holy places, and in priests. It is especially associated with breath and blood and all the other fluids of the body. It can kill or cure. To touch a Maori chief, or anything that has been in contact with him, is certain death; but he can also use his power to heal.

Then again, besides supernatural *personalities* and supernatural *fluids*, it is possible, I think, to distinguish an intermediate category of supernatural *objects*. Australian sorcerers often derive their power from a mystic quartz crystal, which they keep inside themselves, but can project outside to kill or cure.<sup>1</sup> It is impersonal, but like the soul it can leave the body. It is not a fluid, but it has many of the magical properties of *mana*. Such a quartz crystal is acquired at initiation and in some places is believed to be the excrement of the sky god.<sup>2</sup> Similar to it are the mystic bones or snakes which Australian sorcerers use in much the same way.<sup>3</sup> The mystic snake, however, seems to belong to yet another

<sup>1</sup> Róheim, *Animism, Magic and the Divine King*, 1930, p. 77 ff.

<sup>2</sup> Róheim, *ibid.*, p. 79. From R. H. Mathews "The Keeparra Ceremony of Initiation," *J.R.A.I.*, XXVI, pp. 272-85.

<sup>3</sup> Róheim, *ibid.*, p. 75 ff. *The Riddle of the Sphinx*, 1934; p. 64, pp. 59, 64.

intermediate category, this time between those of spirits and quartz crystals or pointing bones. It is not quite a personality like the true soul or mystic double, but it is more of a personality than the crystal or the bone. A large proportion of what are called souls are really 'internal parasites' of this type. Thus in parts of Sumatra the soul is a fly, in Germany it was sometimes a mouse, in Malaya a mannikin about the size of a thumb.<sup>1</sup> This last comes nearer to the spiritual double, from which however it differs in being a concrete parasite, not a shadow or reflection.

Thus the supernatural realm is rich with many forms of life, any of which may be either good or bad. First of all, there are fully developed spirit personalities, souls, ghosts and anthropomorphic gods and devils. Then there are a variety of sub-human creatures, soul- or spirit-serpents, for example, shading off into mere objects, such as talismans, fetishes or quartz-crystals. And lastly there is the mystic fluid, or *mana*, which too has many forms. All these may be found either free, or owned by individuals. When owned they belong more particularly to the sub-world of souls. But even a soul, which is owned by an individual, need not stay with or in his body. Sometimes it remains permanently outside him, living, for instance, in a tree or animal. Conversely, a spirit, a spiritual object or fluid, which is not owned by an individual, may take up its abode in or permeate his body. In short, man believes in spiritual personalities, creatures, objects and fluids, which may be outside or inside himself, which he may or may not feel he owns, and which may be good or bad.

<sup>1</sup> Frazer, *Golden Bough*, iii, pp. 28, 36, 37.



Instead of speculating about the precise cultural pedigrees of these various concepts, it will be more profitable to hunt for parallels among the delusions of civilized psychotics. For in the psycho-analytic case histories of paranoia, melancholia and obsessional neuroses, one may study all types of superstition in the making. The melancholic with hyperchondria may believe himself to be possessed by every kind of evil from a fully developed devil to a variety of more or less animated poisons or germs. Exactly the same kinds of being or entity persecute the paranoiac, but in his case his persecutors remain outside himself.<sup>1</sup> These may be identified with his neighbours, whom he is liable to attack in imagined self-defence, or they may be purely supernatural beings, who attack him with mystic emanations, which he often describes as electric or magnetic rays.

Apart, therefore, from the differences in social setting, which on the one hand favours and even institutionalizes such superstitions, and on the other strives to rationalize them by the over-anxious stressing of materialistic philosophy, the problems of primitive animatism or animism and of psychosis are almost identical. No one would pretend that these problems are fully solved; but psycho-analysis, and especially the psycho-analysis of children,<sup>2</sup> has

<sup>1</sup> From one point of view, paranoia may be regarded as a psychic defence against melancholia. The victim stresses his external persecutors in order to avoid admitting that he is also persecuted by still more terrifying internal ones.

<sup>2</sup> Melanie Klein, *Psycho-Analysis of Children*. This book seems to me to give the key to animatistic, as opposed to animistic, thought.

given us at least the outlines of a satisfactory explanation.

The psychotic differs from the normal individual in degree rather than in kind. As a first approximation he may be described as an infant who has never grown up or who has returned to infancy. Most of us grow up more or less; that is, we become fairly sane. But we all start as infants, with thought processes that are psychotic rather than rational, or, what is much the same, as animatists and animists. Therefore in infancy we may expect to find the clue both to psychosis and to superstition.

It will be convenient, though slightly artificial, to divide the child's early life into two periods, and to consider them in turn. In the first, we shall find him building concepts of supernatural fluids, substances and sub-human creatures, which seem to correspond closely with the primitive concepts of Dr. Marett's phase of pre-animism or animatism. In the second, he forms unconscious pictures of good and evil parent figures, fully developed personalities, which seem to correspond with the animistic beliefs in good and evil spirits. The argument may be summarised as follows.

Probably the first distinction made by the newborn child is between pain and pleasure, which is ultimately perhaps relief from pain. He is hungry, drinks and is satisfied; feels uncomfortable, belches, breaks wind or defecates and is comfortable again. Such experiences make up his life. But soon he distinguishes also between *things* that cause pleasure and *things* that cause pain. He begins to hate what causes pain and to love what causes pleasure. He divides his world into two types of object: good and bad. But since to him, all associations are causal

connections, the badness or goodness of his objects have little relation to their actual quality. The milk and nipple are bad objects when he has indigestion, and good ones when he feels well, though there may be no actual change in them. Moreover, at this stage he seems to confuse physical causes with psychological effects. For if bad objects cause rage, he is apt to think that his rage has caused their badness. Thus he feels omnipotent, or rather feels that he can control everything except himself. His primary enemy is his own aggressiveness, which creates the bad objects that cause him pain.

Now the child is a metabolic organism with two primary functions: incorporation and ejection. He incorporates the nipple, milk and air, and ejects fæces, urine and breath, sometimes in the form of screams. Thus he soon distinguishes between these two functions, and between their objects, dividing his world of good and bad objects into things that go into and things that come out of his body. But as he makes little or no distinction between fantasy and fact, imaginary acts of incorporation or ejection are equivalent to real ones. Thus his world is divided into inside and outside, and contains objects both bad and good, most of which are probably imaginary.

If by nature he is healthy and easily contented, if he is well fed and cared for, the good objects predominate. He gets what he wants, and feels the good nipple to be inside him always ready when he wants it. There is little to disturb his sense of pleasurable omnipotence.

If on the other hand, he is not healthy or easily contented by nature, is ill cared for or badly fed, he feels himself and his external world to be full of bad

objects, which seem to be the product of the rage and hate they inevitably provoke.

At this stage he has little co-ordinated movement in his arms and legs. He has no idea of using them, as grown-up persons do, in his attempts to control his world. He can only scream and perform acts of incorporation and ejection; and to these three actions he attributes a magical efficacy. His scream is a magical invocation or exorcism, to bring the nipple when he is hungry or drive it away when he has indigestion. He can also incorporate or eject any object in fantasy if not in fact. Both these functions can be used aggressively. He can eat or bite to destroy bad objects as well as to incorporate good ones. He can eject good objects as gifts, or bad ones as aggressive projectiles. Moreover, the sense of omnipotence in the function spreads on to its object. The good and bad objects he incorporates and ejects become endowed with magic power for good or evil.

These objects then are the infantile equivalents of those supernatural fluids, substances and creatures which play so large a rôle in the delusions of psychosis and of superstition. It is difficult to make precise distinctions in a field where all categories are excessively confused. But the child's scream, which has the properties of an incantation, and the urine he gives out and the milk he takes in, seem to be the original forms of what I have called the supernatural fluids. Certainly breath, urine and milk are all commonly supposed to possess magic power. A Maori would expect to die if he ate food cooked in the pot heated on the fire blown on by the sacred breath of a chief. A Pondo African drinks a little of his own urine before magically attacking a thunderstorm.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Hunter, *Reaction to Conquest*, 1936, p. 298.

And in the Middle Ages milk from a cow of one colour was especially efficacious to make butter for a holy salve.<sup>1</sup> A similar magic power is often believed to reside in the other fluids of the body, for instance, blood, spittle and semen. Probably these too derive their supernatural properties by association from the first magical fluids of the child.

As breath, urine and milk seem to be ontogenetically the most fundamental of magical fluids, so excrement seems to be the most fundamental of magical substances. It is used in its crude form in magic all over the world. Among the Wiimtaio, a candidate for the profession of sorcery was plastered with human excrement.<sup>2</sup> Or to take another example from a different area, an Anglo-Saxon work contains the following recipe: 'For a man haunted by apparitions work a drink of white hound's thost (excrement) in bitter lay. Wonderfully it healeth.'<sup>3</sup> And in New Guinea, we hear of stones smeared with excrement having a magical efficacy. That other magical substances are symbols of excrement is of course difficult to prove without analysing the sorcerers who use them. The Australian sorcerer, however, confirms our suspicion; for he himself tells us that his magical quartz-crystal, which he keeps in his belly, is the excrement of the sky god.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sextus Placitus. Milk and butter are also used in Africa to purify the relations of a dead man after his funeral, Seligman, *Pagan Tribes of the Nilotic Sudan*, 1933, p. 237.

<sup>2</sup> Röheim, *Animism, Magic and the Divine King*, 1930, p. 106.

<sup>3</sup> Sextus Placitus.

<sup>4</sup> Röheim, *Animism, Magic and the Divine King*, 1930, p. 79.



The prototypes of supernatural creatures, as opposed to supernatural substances and fluids, are to be found I think in those parts of the human body (such as the breasts, the nipple and the penis) which attract the child's attention in the early period before he has learnt to distinguish personalities as a whole. For in his fantasy, these so-called 'part-objects' are animate beings capable of an independent existence both inside and outside himself. Some superstitions are almost undisguised variants of such infantile ideas preserved in the unconscious. Thus, for example, the idea of the nipple as a 'part-object,' which can be found in isolation or in unexpected places, is reflected in the medieval belief that a witch had a supernumerary teat often in her anus or genital with which she fed her familiar. Suspected witches were sometimes examined for these teats, and possibly burnt on the conclusive evidence of piles.<sup>1</sup> Sometimes the child projects his own greed upon the nipple, and turns it into a kind of vampire. This idea, too, finds an almost undisguised expression in the figure of the *subach* of Western Sudan, which has a sucking apparatus like the trunk of an elephant protruding from its anus. It sits on the mouths of its victims and sucks their blood.<sup>2</sup> Since the child identifies the nipple with the penis, some of his imaginary part-objects combine the functions of both. The supernatural snake of the Australian sorcerer is clearly a phallic nipple of this kind. He keeps it in his inside and projects it into others either to kill them by

<sup>1</sup> Murray, *Witch Cult in Western Europe*, 1921, pp. 90-6.

<sup>2</sup> Róheim, *Animism, Magic and the Divine King*, 1930, pp. 110-11. From Frobenius, *Kulturtypen aus dem Westsudan*, 1910, pp. 76-86.

eating or poisoning their internal organs, or to cure them by sucking out some evil which is already there.<sup>1</sup> This mystic snake is clearly first cousin to the detachable penis, which in a Tobriand story, leaves its owner, wriggles through the grass like a snake, and attacks unsuspecting women.<sup>2</sup>

There is no clear division between animatism and animism, between the field of magical fluids, substances or part-objects, and that of spirits with fully developed personalities. The one merges imperceptibly into the other. For instance, it is often difficult to say whether a particular soul is an emanation or an internal parasite,<sup>3</sup> or whether a given fetish is a magical substance or the abode of a god. In other words, animism, which I suggest is a product of a later phase of infancy, is seldom if ever found in a pure form; it is permeated with animatistic impurities from the earlier phase. Broadly speaking, however, I think the supernatural spirits of animism are products of that period in which the child begins to conceive of himself and his parents as integrated personalities, a period which seems to be associated with what is called the phallic and Œdipean stage of development.

Sucking is soon complicated by biting. Vague impulses to bite into, to cut open and penetrate the mother appear, which seem to be embryonic forms of the masculine sex impulse. It is at this time too, I think, that the child, like other young animals, begins to make copulatory movements, which seem to be instinctive or semi-reflex (the so-called pelvic thrust). Moreover, he develops a strong interest

<sup>1</sup> Róheim, *The Riddle of the Sphinx*, 1934, p. 64.

<sup>2</sup> Malinowski, *The Sexual Life of Savages*, 1929, p. 348.

<sup>3</sup> See p. 80 above.

both in his own genitals and in those of his parents. But in these early sexual fantasies there are at first no clear distinctions, the vagina being confused with the mouth and the penis with the nipple. Certain typical fantasies appear, which seem to originate by the projection of the child's own aggressive and sexual desires.

In the first place, there is the fantasy of a father figure with a giant phallus—so much bigger and better than the child's own. This is certainly the foundation of those phallic devils of primitive superstition all over the world. To take a single example, typical of all the rest, the Pondo of South Africa are much troubled by a species of demon called *Thikolose*. These are small hairy beings. 'The penis of the male is so long that he carries it over his shoulder, and he has only one buttock.' <sup>1</sup>

It is worth noticing that asymmetry of all kinds is very characteristic of phallic demons. In Arachoba, on Christmas Eve, the Callicantsare demons hold a festal procession. 'One rides a cock, another a horse the size of a dog, a third a little donkey, and others on unknown small animals. But these animals are lame, or one-eyed, or one-eared, or they are without some other member.' <sup>2</sup>

Another infantile fantasy is that of the phallic mother, who has stolen the father's penis and who keeps it inside her. This too seems to be the product of projection. The child wishes to swallow the nipple and the penis, which is confused with it, and attributes this desire to his mother. Fantasy and fact are not distinguished, so that he comes to localize the phallus both inside himself and inside the mother figure. This phallic mother can be clearly

<sup>1</sup> Hunter, *Reaction to Conquest*, 1936, p. 276.

<sup>2</sup> Róheim, *The Riddle of the Sphinx*, 1934, p. 51.

recognized not only in such figures as the Gorgon, the Sphinx and Brunhild,<sup>1</sup> but also in the witch with her broom-stick, and in the snake mother goddess of which there are innumerable examples. She seems to have been the central figure in Cretan religion. The Indian Kali, too, is a phallic mother. She is usually depicted, covered with phallic symbols, in the act of cutting off her husband Siva's head, that is, of castrating him.

It is interesting to note that witches and sorcerers who are the first cousins of phallic devils, are very fond of milk, or destroy milk.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps this belief is derived from an infantile conception of the phallus as a kind of greedy nipple.

Another, perhaps the most important, fantasy is the so-called 'primal fantasy' of a sadistic intercourse between the parents. This too is largely a product of projection; the child conceives his parents to be as sadistic as himself. It recurs, as we have seen,<sup>3</sup> in many myths of creation, when father sky and mother earth remain in a perpetual embrace until separated by their children. Among Central Australian demons, there is an important class of double-devils, who are always joined in intercourse. Anyone who sees them, unless he is a very powerful sorcerer, will surely die.<sup>4</sup>

Some of these phallic beings seem to be half-way between animatism and animism. It is difficult, for instance, to determine whether the supernatural snake, used by the Australian sorcerer to injure his

<sup>1</sup> See p. 38 *seq.* above.

<sup>2</sup> Róheim, *Animism, Magic and the Divine King*, 1930, p. 105 *seq.*

<sup>3</sup> See p. 28 above.

<sup>4</sup> Róheim, *Riddle of the Sphinx*, 1938, p. 28 *seq.*

enemies, is to be classed as a 'bad part-object' or as an evil spirit. On the other hand, the phallic god Pan is a fully developed personality.

Among the higher supernatural beings who have distinct personalities, the benevolent ones tend to be desexualized, while the malevolent ones usually retain their sexual character. There is more of the 'part-object' about them. The parental character of the benevolent deities is fairly obvious. Everyone is familiar with father gods and mother goddesses. But that satanic powers of both sexes are symbols of the parents is more difficult to prove on purely anthropological evidence; since they are much further removed from conscious memories of the real parents. Sometimes they betray their true character. The Indian phallic devil Gandhava, for instance, when he lies with a woman, may personate her father.<sup>1</sup>

So much for the various categories of supernatural being and their prototypes in infantile fantasy. But before turning from animism to magic, it may be worth while to point out one psychological difference between the rational agnostic and the superstitious believer. Both have projected their own impulses in infancy and early childhood to form an animatistic collection of good and bad fluids, substances and part-objects, and an animistic host of good and evil supernatural parents. But whereas the rational agnostic may rediscover his good and bad fluids, substances and part-objects in patent medicines and bacteria,<sup>2</sup> and his good and evil parents in the leaders

<sup>1</sup> Róheim, *Riddle of the Sphinx*, 1934, p. 42 seq.

<sup>2</sup> More generally, in all the ideals and values he is prepared to fight for, and in those he is prepared to fight against.



of his own and his opponent's political parties, the superstitious believer rediscovers these mystic substances and supernatural beings in the traditional system of magic and religion. Moreover, the agnostic, in attributing his hypochondriarchal symptoms to germs, is no nearer the truth than the believer who attributes them to possession.

## 2. MAGIC

Magic has been defined as the technique of animism. Animism is a system of belief; magic the behaviour determined by it, for irrational behaviour is the natural consequence of irrational belief. Put psycho-analytically I think the structure of magic may be described as follows: The foundation is the false belief. The infant's failure to distinguish between fantasy and reality leads to his belief that he has destroyed or injured his mother, that he is persecuted by the boomerang-like bogies of his own projected aggression, which he may locate both outside and inside himself. The inevitable consequence of such beliefs is neurotic anxiety—perhaps the strongest and most persistent drive in life. Among the many typical reactions to this anxiety is that irrational behaviour which forms the obsessional symptoms of the civilized neurotic and the systems of magic of the savage. The civilized neurotic must, to a great extent, construct his own symptoms; the savage finds them ready made. The civilized man struggles against them; the savage accepts them, because they are accepted by his fellows.

Classifications, though often a little artificial are necessary aids to thought. We may begin then by dividing magic into two main types: negative and positive. Negative magic consists in avoiding certain

objects or actions. It is concerned with the system of obsessional avoidances we have already partially discussed under the heading of taboos. The civilized neurotic avoids the cracks in paving stones, or lighting three cigarettes with one match, or walking under ladders. The savage avoids touching his chief's weapons, or walking under leaning trees. By observing such restrictions, both succeed in escaping a certain amount of neurotic anxiety.

According to Freud, as we have seen in the last chapter, the performance of a tabooed act excites anxiety because it symbolizes a repressed desire. As far as tabooed acts are concerned this theory seems fully comprehensive. It readily explains such taboos as those against killing the totem (symbolic parricide) or marrying a fellow totemite (symbolic incest). It can even explain cases in which the tabooed act is itself inhibitory; for repressed desires include the self-destructive products of guilt as well as the primary impulses that may have evoked the guilt. During expeditions for hunting or war, the men engaged, and their wives at home, must avoid any action suggesting failure, for instance, they must avoid touching greasy substances lest the prey should slip through their fingers. The hunters are not wholehearted: fear of the destructive tendencies on which the success of the expedition hangs gives rise to an unconscious wish that the prey should after all escape. It is the repression of this wish that must be reinforced by the taboo.

One characteristic of taboos, however, Freud's theory in its classical form seemed to have left unexplained—namely the *mana*, the supernatural charge that inheres in a tabooed object. We have now identified this *mana* as a symbol of those contents

of the body which the child's unconscious fantasy endows with magic power for good or evil. Thus while an act is tabooed in order to prevent the symbolic satisfaction of a repressed desire, an object would seem to be tabooed in order to prevent contamination by, or in the last analysis the incorporation of, a bad or dangerous substance, that is a substance that the child's unconscious aggression has made bad or dangerous.<sup>1</sup> But it should be remembered that the distinction between a tabooed object and a tabooed act is a distinction of degree rather than of kind. On the one hand, the touching of a tabooed object is an act which may itself represent a repressed desire. And on the other hand, the performance of a tabooed act may itself contaminate the perpetrator with impurity or guilt, which since it can be washed away is something that belongs to the category of supernatural fluids.

While negative magic consists in avoiding certain actions or objects, in positive magic certain actions are compulsorily performed. These are equivalent to the obsessional rituals of neurotics. Their psychological function is the same as that of taboos, namely, to reduce anxiety.

Positive magic is of two types: white and black. I am inclined to associate these with reparative and destructive trends respectively. But the same rite may be both reparative and destructive. The Egyptian priests, for example, aided the sun god Ra by magically attacking his enemy Apepi. Probably both elements are present in all rites, as they are in all obsessional symptoms, though mixed in very different proportions.

White magic is approved of by society and is often

<sup>1</sup> See p. 83 above.

practised communally. It is concerned with securing good hunting or success in war, large herds, fine crops, and with the prevention and cure of illness. Hunting and war magic, so far as this is positive and not composed of taboos on acts that magically assist the other side, are largely aggressive, like the magic to protect Ra by attacking Apepi. Among the methods of securing a good harvest, two are of special interest: a marriage may be celebrated or a victim killed. Thus, for example, peasants may copulate in the fields to encourage the crops to follow their example and be fruitful.<sup>1</sup> Or, in more elaborate cultures, there is the union of two ceremonial persons—brother and sister or son and mother in fiction if not in fact—who incarnate the god and goddess. But the god who was married to stimulate the crops was also often killed for the same purpose. Sir James Frazer suggested that this was to forestall the impotency of old age and to transfer his spirit while still hale and hearty to his successor. But there are clearly other motives. So far as the god is a father symbol, the sacrifice is a symbolic parricide, which doubtless satisfied the unconscious parricidal impulses of his worshippers, and is possibly a derivative of a totemic sacrament.

More often, however, the divine victim seems to have been a comely youth, like Attis or Adonis, who is represented as the lover of his mother or his sister. Indeed, in Chapter II we saw reason to believe that the myth of Œdipus records a very widespread Œdipean ritual of this kind, in which the hero god, after participating in the sacrifice of his predecessor

<sup>1</sup> Sometimes a taboo takes the place of a ritual, continence being required between sowing and harvest. Frazer, *Golden Bough*, ii, p. 104 *seq.*

who was his father in fact or fiction, married his mother, or at least the human goddess who reincarnated his father's consort, and finally perished in his turn to stimulate the crops.

Now in Chapter III, we were struck by the paradox between incest, sacred and profane; for whereas divine incest was necessary to prevent the ruin of man, beast and vegetation, profane incest brought about exactly these calamities. In one respect, however, both types of incest are the same. In both the perpetrator was killed. The incestuous layman dies because he has broken a taboo the consequences of which can only be avoided by his death. But to the god, incest is an obligation. Why then must he also die? Not only, I think, in order that his spirit may be transferred to a successor, or distributed among his worshippers in a sacramental meal, or his body used as a magical manure. But also because he is a scapegoat. All men commit incest and parricide in their unconscious fantasy. This is the load of original sin which they are born with, or at least acquire in their cradles. This load, this sense of impending doom, has tortured the neurotics of every age. But if they can compel another to commit their sin and suffer for it, they are free. The hero king or god, of whom *Œdipus* is the classical example, is I suggest a scapegoat of this kind. He suffers to expiate the sins of others; but in order to do so he must first commit these sins himself. He plays a leading rôle in the sacrifice of his father and marries his mother or his sister. Only so can he take the sins of the community upon himself, and expiate them by his death. The *Œdipean* ritual, of course, may have grown, and probably did grow, out of other rituals with other meanings. The divine marriage



and the sacrifice may have had separate origins, the one in the copulation of peasants to stimulate their crops, and the other in the sacramental eating of an animal god. But in its fully developed form the emphasis seems to have been shifted from parricide to expiation, from the crime to its talion punishment. If so the most important psychological function of the rite must have been to expiate the Œdipean sin which all men commit in fantasy and which is the main source of their neurotic fears. Hence its power to relieve anxiety, that is, its magical effect.

Coming now to white magic practised by individuals rather than by society at large, this consists mainly in rites of protection and cure. The danger feared seems to be of two kinds: the loss of a good fluid, object or spirit, or possession by a bad one. The medieval European and his cattle might be sucked by a vampire, or elf-shot; the present-day savage may have his soul stolen, or he may be possessed by a demon.

A common protection against calamity of all kinds was the talisman, often a phallic emblem. Horns, teeth and mandrakes were much prized for this purpose by medieval Europeans. A broom stick was a protection against witches. Such phallic talismans were, I think, psychological protections because the good object which might be stolen, or the bad one which might gain possession, was itself a symbolic penis. Thus the talisman was a reassurance against both kinds of danger: the phallic devils could make one ill neither by stealing one's soul nor by entering one's body.

The use of herbs for protection was also very common. For example, garlic was a protection against witches. Blood too, or substances like it such as red

ochre, was, and is still, commonly used against many forms of supernatural evil. Blood is drunk as a medicine in Australia, and Kaffir women use paste and red clay to protect them against the dangers of childbirth.<sup>1</sup> Such prophylactics belong rather to the realm of supernatural fluids.

If protection failed, or was not used, other rites could restore the damage. One would expect to find two kinds of curative magic: rites to put back the good object stolen, and rites to drive out or exorcise the bad object.

' In the Wimmera district of Australia, when a person is ill the wizard is sent for to throw a good spell on him. He takes something like a rope out of his stomach and climbs up to the sky to have an interview with the shadow. On his return if the man is to recover he says: "Your shadow is come back and you will soon be well," but if he is to die, he says: "I could not get your shadow."'<sup>2</sup> A Chinese medicine man will sometimes take a coat that his patient has recently worn and entice the missing soul back into it. Then the coat is put as soon as possible on the body of the sick man. Among the Chukchee, the shaman finds and restores the missing soul, usually in the shape of a black beetle. It crawls over the sick man's head trying to find a way in. Then the shaman opens the skull to put the beetle in its proper place. It may also enter through the mouth, armpit, fingers, toes, intestines, etc. If the shaman cannot find the lost soul, he gives the patient

<sup>1</sup> W. R. Dawson, *Magician and Leech*, 1929, p. 9.

<sup>2</sup> Róheim, *Animism, Magic and the Divine King*, 1930, pp. 184-5. From H. Livingstone, *Grammar and Vocabulary of the Minyung people*, p. 24. Bound with Threlkeld, *Awabakal*.

part of his own soul. The patient is then said to become the son of the shaman.<sup>1</sup>

Often the rites of putting back the soul and driving out the evil are combined. 'In North-West Australia the doctors cure illnesses by expelling the spirits sent by other tribes. The doctor stands over the patient and groans aloud, and then makes a noise resembling the hushing of a child to sleep. Next he stands with one foot upon the affected part, and then briskly rubs and squeezes with his hands. When he considers this massage sufficient he puts his mouth to the affected part and proceeds to draw out the evil spirit. After all the evil spirits have been drawn out he runs some little distance with them in his hands and carefully buries them. Then he returns, puts his hand to his side, draws out a good spirit and inserts it into the patient. He makes a clicking noise—probably with his finger nail—which they believe is the spirit being drawn out.'<sup>2</sup>

The sucking out of evil in this way is one of the commonest forms of magical cure. The medicine man usually exhibits what he pretends to have sucked out: a round stone, a worm or some other small object.

Sometimes a good object is put in to drive out a bad one. The Central Australian medicine man has magical bones, sticks, snakes or stones, which he may keep in his own body. He can use them to kill or cure. He may project his snake into a patient to

<sup>1</sup> Róheim, *Animism, Magic and the Divine King*, 1930, pp. 185-6. From Bogoras "The Chuckchee," *Jesup North Pacific Expedition*, vii, 1907, p. 333, 463-5.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 112. From Withnell, *The Customs and Traditions of the Aboriginal Natives of North-Western Australia*, 1901, p. 32.

suck out the evil, or push with his *nankara*-finger, 'and his invisible bone pushes out the bad bone which is equally invisible.'<sup>1</sup>

Turning from white magic to black, one is at first surprised to find that the technique for curing patients is remarkably similar to that for killing enemies. Corresponding to the doctor who sucks out the evil is the vampire who sucks out the good; and corresponding with the cure by restoring the soul is the magical injection of a bad spirit—often in the form of a serpent. Expressed in psycho-analytic language, two of the main forms of disease-magic are infantile oral and phallic activities, each of which can be used for good or evil according to whether the sorcerer's intentions are benevolent or aggressive.

While healing magic is usually performed on the patient, in aggressive magic the victim may be present only as it were by proxy. It is not necessary even to point one's magical bones or stick at him, or for him actually to smell the smoke from one's burning herbs. Quite as much damage may be done by sticking pins into his image, smoking or burning his hair clippings, his nail parings or above all some of his excrement; and of course, if one has discovered his real name, one can cause him any injury one likes. For this reason, wise gods like Jahveh and Ra used to keep their secret names to themselves.

The almost universal practice of injuring a man by injuring his image or some part of him, is an example of sympathetic or homeopathic magic. This seems to be based on two infantile beliefs. In the first place, the infant feels its existence to depend on its possession of certain good objects, which are

<sup>1</sup> Róheim, *The Riddle of the Sphinx*, 1934, p. 64.

animistically conceived: the good milk and nipple and their derivatives such as good breath and the good phallus. Among the later symbols of these are the essence, vitality or *mana* of a person, his soul substance or his soul, which are identified with his image or reflection, his name, footprints, or any cast-off part of his body such as his nail-parings or excrement. A threat to such symbols of good fluids, part-objects or spirits, is more alarming than a threat to the whole person. In the second place, the infant, as we know, confuses reality with fantasy, especially if the fantasy is dramatised. Thus to the unconscious a dramatization of a hostile desire is equivalent to its realization.

At the beginning of this section, I suggested that magic, like an obsessional symptom, is an irrational method of dealing with irrational anxiety. This is obviously true of healing magic and white magic in general. It is also true, I think of aggressive magic, which is really an offensive defensive. The sorcerer resembles the paranoiac; if he did not attack his persecutors, he would be overwhelmed by them. In Central Australia, a storm is a pair of copulating demons. When they appear the sorcerer throws his magical stones and other projectiles at them to drive them away.<sup>1</sup> In South Africa, among the Pondo, when a storm threatens, a man may drink some of his urine and rush out stabbing at the approaching clouds with a stick or a spear, which has been treated by a herbalist.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, when the sorcerer attacks his human enemies he is, I think, moved by a conscious or unconscious fear of magical attacks upon himself, or upon his own good objects.

<sup>1</sup> Róheim, *The Riddle of the Sphinx*, 1934, pp. 28, 64.

<sup>2</sup> Hunter, *Reaction to Conquest*, 1936, p. 298.



As a society develops and becomes more civilized, black magic and private magic tend to be condemned and to die out. But white magic, in its communal forms, is often transformed into religious ritual. The killing of one member of a species, either to incorporate its mystic powers, or magically to assist the killing of its fellows, or to increase their fertility—all or any of these primitive acts of magic may have been the forerunners of the elaborate sacrifice of vegetation gods or goddesses. This, whatever else it does, seems to allay anxiety by repeating in a weakened form the fantasied crime of destroying the parents, who are the original source of life and nourishment, by expiating the guilt by proxy and by the creation of new life to replace the old. But whatever its ultimate origin, the magical sacrifice of the corn god developed into an offering to the god, and finally into an act of homage.

In at least one case, however, the very primitive idea of a communal eating of the god has survived in, or rather returned to, a highly developed religion. The divine essence, which in theophagic rites of this kind the worshipper consumes and incorporates within himself, would seem to be, in the last analysis, the good and animated milk, the good nipple and the good penis identified with it, and all the other imaginary fluids, substances and part-objects that the infant needs to counteract the influence of all the bad substances that threaten him both from within and from without. Yet the same act that allays one form of anxiety arouses another; for, after all, to eat one's god is an aggressive act. This is one of the reasons why the rite must be communal. The worshippers are not only united by partaking of the same divine substance; they also share the

guilt. Moreover, as in the legend of Ombure, the angry deity will spare his own substance. The same rite, of course, has different meanings at different layers of the unconscious, for instance, at one level, oral, at another, phallic. Therefore complete interpretations are difficult or impossible to give. But the discovery of deeper interpretations does not invalidate the more superficial ones. These may be true enough at their own level.

Like ritual, prayer also developed out of magic. The infant likes to believe his voice omnipotent; it can summon or dismiss, create or destroy. The savage, who has not repressed this infantile belief, uses charms to invoke or exorcise the good and bad influences or spirits of his world. With the growth of religion, such charms develop into petitions, then into expressions of praise, homage, and submission to a divine will. Yet here also the old significance tends to return. The automatic mumbling of hymns or prayers, which have lost all meaning by constant repetition, is felt to have a kind of magical efficacy—especially if chanted in a dead and foreign tongue.

The highest gods, too, are the products of a long process of development. The animated fluids, substances, and part-objects of infancy and the most primitive superstition, give place to animate spirits, as unreliable as chance, sometimes friendly, sometimes hostile, to man. Some of these degenerate into puckish and merely comic figures;<sup>1</sup> others become purely evil, satanic powers. From among them, however, there often emerges a father god of justice, a mother goddess of mercy, and perhaps a divine son whose sacrifice brings salvation to all mortals who

<sup>1</sup> The conversion of a terrifying demon into a comic figure is another method of economizing anxiety.

can identify themselves, and suffer, with him. And finally, to the philosophic theologian at least, these three figures may be merged into a god of love, who is himself, perhaps, nothing but a concept with a purely nominal existence, the Platonic Idea of whatever altruism is to be found in man.

The development from magic to religion is also characterized by a change in the technique of dealing with anxiety. Security by means of obsessional or magical avoidances and actions, that is, taboos and rituals, gives place first to the more masochistic idea of salvation through vicarious sacrifice, and then to happiness through restitutive work.

The psycho-analytic technique is different. So far as it helps the neurotic to expose the false beliefs of his own unconscious; so far as it convinces him that he has not forfeited Paradise, that he is not an infant who may have destroyed or injured his parents and who is threatened with destruction or injury in his turn, he is free from the curse of Adam, or Cain or Tantalus. He is no longer compelled to repeat his crime, or condemned to hopeless attempts to expiate it, or repair the damage. The good objects and persons of his infancy have become stronger; the bad ones less terrifying. And he rediscovers them, not in the unreal products of a distorted imagination, but in the values and persons he is more rationally prepared to fight for or against. As far as external circumstances allows, he can be—what was not possible before—both sane and happy.

## CHAPTER V

# THE ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURE

### I. THE ORIGIN OF CULTURE

THE act of generalization, of finding identity in difference, is more pleasurable—for most of us at least—than the act of analysis, of finding difference in identity. For this reason, perhaps, differences tend to be neglected, especially during those periods in which science is making a spectacular advance. Such a period followed the publication of the *Origin of Species* and the *Descent of Man*. Darwin's theory had been a bitter pill to human pride; but once man's kinship with other animals had been accepted, certain important differences between them were overlooked in the enthusiastic search for homologies. One outstanding difference, indeed, was stressed. Man was consoled with a unique intelligence as a substitute for the loss of his immortal soul. But, with this exception, his several characters, both physical and functional, were made to proclaim his affinity with his more backward cousins, whom it was supposed he had outstripped by virtue of his intelligence, and of his intelligence alone. Thus, to take three examples, his complex society was dismissed too lightly as a product of his gregariousness—a character shared with all social animals; and his warfare as an example of the struggle for existence, which favoured, or was supposed to favour, the survival of aggressive types. Even his magic, his morals

and religion, called for no special explanation. They were rational inferences from insufficient data—what might be expected of animals whose curiosity and intelligence were abnormally developed.

Such generalizations of late nineteenth-century anthropology were significant enough in their day. They still possess a large element of truth. But they have become superficial—as indeed our own most enlightening generalizations will become superficial to our children. They record identity, but neglect equally important difference. A vast gap separates human and animal society: one is based on life-long loyalties and hatreds, often to or of distant individuals or even ideals; the other on little more than a sheep-like impulse to run about together. There is, too, a vast gap between human war and animal aggression. Animals do not prey upon their own species. They squabble over food, the males fight over the females; but if the defeated rival runs away, he is not pursued and killed. Baboons have general fights, all against all, or all against one; never one group against another group. The essence of human war, however, is that each group fights together, under a leader. The conscious motives too are different and less rational. Of these the most fundamental is probably revenge—a motive apparently unknown to animals, except in just-so stories.<sup>1</sup>

Lastly, human superstition has no parallel among animals at all. Indeed, it is so unique a quality that Dr. Marett has proposed for *homo sapiens* the alternative title of *homo religiosus*.<sup>2</sup>

Can these differences be explained in terms of

<sup>1</sup> See Money-Kyrle, 'The Origin and Development of War,' *British Journal of Medical Psychology*.

<sup>2</sup> *Sacraments of Simple Folk*, 1934, p. 3.



difference in intelligence? Intelligence was the one special quality preserved to man by the early evolutionists. But it does not alone account for his social solidarity, his warfare, or his superstition.

Superstition, as we have already seen, is to be derived not from rational curiosity undisciplined by experiment, but from the psychotic mechanisms of early infancy. We have seen how animatistic and animistic beliefs dominate the minds—conscious or unconscious—of children in savage and civilized communities alike; and how they survive in the unconscious and give rise to man's neurotic anxiety and to the techniques he has developed to cope with it: his taboos, his magic and ritual, his morals and religion. But this by no means exhausts their influence. They are also, I think, among the main factors that determine some of those other characters that distinguish man from other animals: for instance, his social solidarity and his proneness to war.

A baboon family, according to Zuckerman,<sup>1</sup> consists of a leading male, his wife or wives, their children, and possibly a bachelor or two. What are the forces that hold it together? Firstly, there is the children's dependence upon their mother, from which may be derived a life-long habit of gregariousness. Secondly, there are the mutual sexual ties between the leading male and his wives. Thirdly, there are the bachelor's heterosexual and homosexual impulses. For these bachelors behave like females towards, and are ridden by, the leading male; but whenever his back is turned, they try to flirt with his wives.

Essentially the same forces unite the human group; but there are significant differences both in their aim

<sup>1</sup> *Social Life of Monkeys and Apes.*

and object. In the first place, the aim of the sexual impulse is more sublimated. The direct sexual impulse, which gives the ape family its by no means uninterrupted solidarity, is more inhibited, less conscious and more constant, in the human group. A sustained loyalty replaces an intermittent physical desire. In the second place, the object of this sublimated impulse is a symbolic parent rather than a real one. The leader of an ape family is a real animal; the leader of a human group is, to a great extent at least, a personified ideal.

The position of the leading ape, and his prestige, depend on the constant evidence of his potency and strength. When these go, he is deposed. The position and prestige of the Central Australian savage, on the other hand, increases with his physical infirmities.<sup>1</sup> The old are symbolic figures, full of *mana*, sorcerers who control the spirits. The young do not challenge their authority. Indeed, in human societies, the dead, and therefore totally incapacitated, are often more powerful than the old and merely infirm. Sometimes, however, the dead delegate their authority to the living. The priest, like a medium, is the mouthpiece of his god.

Put in psycho-analytic language, the human child projects his own impulses to form first good and bad substances or powers, then kind and evil imaginary parents. He builds the animatistic and animistic realm of superstition, which either consciously or unconsciously will influence almost every feature of his later life. In particular, he will identify his good objects and spirits with his leader and his gods, or personify them in his abstract ideals.

Unlike the ape, man can be loyal to a remote

<sup>1</sup> Róheim, *Riddle of the Sphinx*, 1934, p. 228.

ruler he has never seen, to a still remoter god, or to an ideal. Therefore, unlike the ape family united under a visible leader, the human group has no upper limit to its size. Indeed, since loyalty is 'catching,' each individual tending to adopt that of the majority of his companions, one might expect to find the human race long since united in one happy family.

Unfortunately for man's utopian dream, however, he creates devils in his cradle as well as gods. And, what is more, the two are not independent. The gods owe their extreme goodness, in large measure, to man's anxiety to counteract the extreme badness of his devils. Then again, since gods and devils, goddesses and witches, are all derived from the same two parents, the leaders or ideals who personify them tend to have unstable qualities in the eyes of their supporters. The good leader may become the bad tyrant without having done anything himself to deserve this change in status. Or the value of a political or religious creed may be reversed for no apparent reason. If leaders or ideals are to retain their goodness they must be opposed by enemies or heresies for their followers to hate.

We now understand the limits of human solidarity. Man must do something with his devils. Scientists, like primitive rain-makers, may find them in nature, which both seek to control; doctors, like primitive medicine men, may find them in disease, which both try to cure. But the man in the street, to which category in private life both scientists and doctors belong, is apt to find them in his foreign neighbours, or political opponents: hence the latent or overt hostility that almost always characterizes inter-group relations.

Hostility *between* groups is correlated with solidarity *within* the group: the wickedder the other side, the

more righteous our own. And conversely, when we make peace with our enemies we tend to quarrel with our friends. For example, the admiration that the allies felt for each other in the Great War partially changed into irritation as soon as it was over.

Thus man's tendency to co-operate for competition—his social solidarity and his proneness to war—would seem to have some of the same infantile sources as his animism, magic and religion. His leaders and his enemies are formed by the same process that creates his gods and devils. He projects his own feelings while he is still in the cradle, and so builds a world of phantoms who aid or threaten him throughout his life.

So much for man's social solidarity, his warfare and his superstition. Among his other distinguishing characters are his language and his technology.

The origin and development of language should be a very fertile field for a psycho-analytical philologist. Freud long ago was struck by the frequent occurrence, in ancient languages, of the same word with opposite meanings. For example, in ancient Egyptian, the word *ken* meant both 'strong' and 'weak,' and in Latin *altus* is both 'high' and 'deep.'<sup>1</sup> This is exactly the same sort of ambiguity that occurs in dreams. Freud also discovered that the names of common objects are often derived from the names of what those objects symbolize in the unconscious. Material, for instance, often symbolizes the mother in dreams; it has the same root as the Latin *mater*. According to Ernest Jones, in his paper on Symbolism,<sup>2</sup> the name of one

<sup>1</sup> Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*; 'The Antithetical Sense of Primal Words,' *Collected Papers*, IV.

<sup>2</sup> *Papers on Psycho-Analysis*, 4th Edn., pp. 129-86.

thing might be first used metaphorically for another, and then later the connection between them would be forgotten. But the symbolic meaning would remain. Thus a vast number of common objects and activities may symbolize sexual objects or activities in dreams; and in many cases the names of such common objects or activities seem to have originally had a sexual meaning. By following up such clues much light might be shed on the development of language.

As to the origin of language, many ingenious suggestions have been made. For instance, there are the 'poo-poo,' 'bow-wow' and 'yo-he-ho' theories, according to which language began with interjections, with imitations, or with noises accompanying rhythmical work. According to other theories it began with courtship or with play. To these I should like to add another speculation. I do not know whether it is original or not.

We have already derived many of man's specific characteristics from the extreme helplessness of the human infant. In particular, his scream is the sole contribution he can make towards the satisfaction of his needs.<sup>1</sup> Hence we might expect, even if we did not know, that the voice would acquire a very special significance for the human species. Now the infant's scream, as we know from psycho-analysis, becomes a magical act. It does sometimes produce what he wants, so that he comes to believe it may always do so: that his aggressive scream, for example, may destroy his mother—a fear which may, in later life, give rise to serious inhibitions of talking. The magical significance of the voice, which is important

<sup>1</sup> *Vide* Spielrein, 'Zur Frage der Entstehung u. Entwicklung der Lautsprache.' Autoref. *Leit. f. Psan.* VI, S. 401.



in the early period of infancy, survives in primitive superstition. Spirits may be controlled by charms—esoteric formulæ the efficacy of which often depends on their being repeated without a single error. In particular, one has complete power over gods or men, if one knows their secret name. For this reason, many savages and gods are careful to keep it to themselves. Swearing is taboo to Quakers; for to swear, as Dr. Rickman has pointed out, is to bind or compel God as well as the person swearing.

Speech, then, to primitive man has two aspects: magical and ordinary. I suggest that the relative importance of the magical aspect increases the further back we go. Eoanthropos may have first named the different objects of his world in a half-conscious effort to control them magically, to evoke the good and exorcise the bad. This theory is really an extension of the theory that derives speech from play. For, in its earliest form, play is magic. 'Peep-bo' is a magic game, the sounds that accompany it are exorcisms and invocations.<sup>1</sup> Whether or not there is any truth in this speculation, we can be fairly sure of one thing: if the voice were not important for its own magical sake, it would never have been practised and so developed into a powerful implement for secular affairs.

Much the same may be said of the development of man's other tools. If necessity is the mother of invention, its father is play (in the infantile sense, that is, the symbolic and partly magical dramatization of conscious and unconscious fantasies). I imagine our remote ancestors chipping off flakes from a core of flint, for the same sort of reason that children knock their toys together when dramatizing

<sup>1</sup> See Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, 1920, pp. 11-16.

and controlling some unconscious fantasy, long before they used this activity deliberately to improve their tools. Similarly, man must have played with fire to master it because of its symbolic meaning long before he realized its practical value and used it to warm him, to cook his food, to protect him from animals, to harden his weapons, hollow his canoes, bake his clay pots or soften his metals.

There may have been an actual connection between the discovery of fire and the making of stone implements. The first fires were perhaps started accidentally by sparks from flint. They must have been very terrifying to our ancestors; and the first sorcerer to master this magical substance, perhaps half a million years ago in the second interglacial epoch, must have been a veritable Prometheus, bold enough to defy the gods. Mythology paints him as a rebel who suffers for his crime. He stole fire from Zeus in a hollow reed. What does this mean to the unconscious? <sup>1</sup> In Indian mythology and elsewhere, the fire drill is a phallus, and the making of fire an act of generation. The fire god Agni is invoked by lovers, men invoke him for virility, women belong to him. To poke a fire wounds Agni and is sinful. In Rome, the sacred fire was tended by vestal virgins, who, according to Frazer, were originally the wives of the fire god. The early kings of Rome were probably the sons of such unions. According to legend, the mothers of both Romulus and of Servius Tullius were impregnated by a flame which appeared to them in the form of a phallus.<sup>2</sup> One may conclude then, that the reed with the fire in it stolen by

<sup>1</sup> See Freud, 'The Acquisition of Power over Fire,' *Int. Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, XIII.

<sup>2</sup> Frazer, *Golden Bough*, Ed. 3, vi, 235.

Prometheus is the paternal phallus, and that fire making is a blasphemous imitation of the divine or paternal act of generation. Hence the fear of fire and the desire to master it.

Originally, we may conjecture, fire was only made by special individuals, sorcerers or chiefs, whose own *mana* was sufficient to protect them from the magical dangers of their trade. At least a faint hint of such a period may have survived into classical times in the Roman custom of having a special priest and priestess, perhaps the Flamen Dialis and his wife the Flaminica, to make the sacred fire. And with Frazer, we may conjecture that the man's duty was to twirl the fire stick and the woman's to hold the hollow board in which it twirled.

Be this as it may, the magical aspects of craftsmanship is still preserved in many primitive communities. The making of fire, the construction of weapons, the building of canoes, the making of pots, the smelting of metals, are hedged about with ceremonies and taboos. To the savage the connection between such activities and the unconscious fantasies they dramatize is only partially repressed. They are pleasurable, but also guilt-laden; therefore the magical technique for mastering the anxiety aroused must be observed. Often the magical power to follow certain crafts without harm runs in certain families. If one of these dies out, no one else dares to usurp its mystic power and the community resigns itself to lose the product of the abandoned craft.

We must not overlook the pure pleasure in any form of craftsmanship. But even this contains an element of magic. For creative work is not the direct product of an instinct, which we share with other animals, but a magical act of reparation,

which in unconscious fantasy restores good objects that have been injured or destroyed.

The psychotic mechanisms of infancy, therefore, are very far-reaching in their effects. They are among the necessary conditions not only of superstition, but also of social solidarity, of warfare, and even of the arts and sciences. To them we largely owe both what we admire and what we regret in our own culture. Without them there would have been little culture to progress or to decline. They are among the most fundamental characters of the human species; more fundamental even than intelligence. It is easy to imagine a large-brained ape, quite as intelligent as man, who was yet devoid of altruism, cruelty or superstition, who was neither brave nor cowardly, who had no neurotic fears to master or succumb to, who was, in short, inhuman. But the ape, however stupid, who buried his departed parents with an offering of nuts, or dismembered his slain opponents to prevent their resurrection, or whose conduct was in any other manner determined by delusion, would at once proclaim his affinity with man. Therefore the main difference between man and other animals is not so much his greater intelligence, but the defects peculiar to his intelligence, almost one may say his capacity for madness.

What is there in man to give him this double-edged capacity? The psychotic fantasies of early infancy vary with differences in innate endowment and education; but their basic form is universal in and peculiar to the human species. Therefore they must be products of certain specific qualities in the human infant or in his environment during the first few months of his extra-uterine existence. Of these, the most fundamental is to be found, I think, in his

innate mechanisms for satisfying his needs. His innate needs are much the same as the young ape's: food and warmth. But his innate mechanisms for satisfying them are far inferior. Only the compensation of a more favourable environment, that is, more maternal care, enable him to survive at all. The young ape is by comparison almost independent. He can get his own food at a much earlier age, and, even in earliest infancy, he can cling to his mother's fur and find his own way to her breasts. The human baby, on the other hand, is wholly dependent on his mother for a long period. I think it is his extreme helplessness, even more than the relatively long period of his dependence,<sup>1</sup> that is significant. When he is hungry, he can only scream—this is the sole mechanism for the fulfilment of his needs he is endowed with—and if his mother does not put the nipple in his mouth there is nothing else he can do. Inevitably, therefore, he will be more subject than other young animals to fits of panic and impotent rage, which will leave a permanent impression. I think we may also assume that he is innately more aggressive than other animals, and that his terror of starvation, caused in the first place by his extreme impotence, will be more likely to give rise to aggressive fantasies of attacking, eating and so mastering, the breasts which he can do so little to control. In the third place, we can credit him with a more vivid fantasy, so that he not only associates his own fury with its object, and turns it into a persecutor, but also believes that he has swallowed what he desires wholly to possess, and so converts the external persecutor into an internal one. These three assumptions—extreme helplessness, great

<sup>1</sup> Róheim, *Riddle of the Sphinx*, 1934, p. 214.



aggressiveness and vivid fantasy—seem then sufficient to explain the first animatistic phase of infancy, or rather that aspect of it in which the infant feels himself to be persecuted from within and from without by malignant fluids, substances and part-objects. But the infant's world is not wholly bad. The immense relief of real satisfaction gives rise to the concept of animated good fluids, substances and part-objects, which may even be primary, but which his impotent rage when he is frustrated threatens to turn into bad ones. His desire to protect these good objects, or to restore them after he has spoilt them in his aggressive fantasies gives rise to a reparative impulse, which is the main factor in all constructive work.<sup>1</sup>

So much for what may be called the pre-animistic, and perhaps pre-Œdipean, phase. To account for the regular appearance of Œdipean fantasies other human peculiarities may have to be considered. The human child is not only more helpless than the young ape, he is also, as Freud has pointed out, helpless for a much longer period. His physical and functional development is retarded, and Róheim<sup>2</sup> has suggested that this retardation is uneven. In animals we must suppose that the oral phase is nearly over before the sexual phase begins. In man, however, the period of oral dependence and the capacity to satisfy sexual desire are both retarded, while the onset of the sexual desire itself has not been retarded at all. Hence the child finds himself not only stirred by sexual desire long before he can

<sup>1</sup> Melanie Klein, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, 1932; Melanie Klein and Joan Riviere, *Love, Hate and Reparation*, 1937.

<sup>2</sup> Róheim, *The Riddle of the Sphinx*, 1934, p. 249 seq.

satisfy it, but also at a period when he is still orally dependent upon his mother. He is not only overwhelmed by another and still more impotent desire, but the desire inevitably expresses itself in oral as well as genital terms and chooses the mother as its object. Thus the two oral impulses, to bite into and penetrate the mother and to suck or take in the nipple are sexualized<sup>1</sup> and so provide prototypes of the masculine impulse to penetrate and the feminine impulse to be penetrated. In both sexes, the masculine component tends to remain directed towards the mother while the feminine component turns rather to the father; whereby, naturally enough, the former usually predominates in the boy and the latter in the girl. But, as we know, reversals of aim and object are common: there are not only feminine boys and masculine girls, but also children to whom the mother appears masculine, that is, phallic, and the father feminine, that is, castrated.

As in the case of oral impulses, children project their sexual impulses, which are largely built on the model of the oral ones, upon their parents, and so construct the so-called primal fantasy of parental intercourse. Since the children's impulses are still dominated by oral sadism, this intercourse is also imagined to be sadistic. Such fantasy images are soon separated from the figures of the real parents, and develop, as we have seen, into the sadistic demons of fairy tales and primitive superstition. At the same time, complimentary figures of ideally good parents emerge: fairy princes and fairy god-mothers to counteract the warlocks and the witches.

Here then, is the basis of human superstition—the

<sup>1</sup> These sexualized oral impulses recur in the adult during the fore-play of intercourse, e.g. kissing.

character that above all others perhaps distinguishes man from apes. Extreme helplessness in infancy, an aggressive disposition, a vivid imagination, and a prolonged period of dependence with unequal retardation, seem the main conditions for the animatistic and animistic beliefs which dominate our conscious or unconscious thoughts. And from such irrational beliefs may be derived, as we have seen in Chapter IV, man's neurotic anxiety and the various techniques he has developed to deal with it.

## 2. THE DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURE

Having derived man's animism from the conditions of his infancy, and the general characters of his culture from his animism, it is tempting to try to reconstruct some of the actual stages of his cultural development.

In the first place, are we to begin with a comparatively social animal like the baboon, who goes about in troops of loosely knit families, or with a comparatively solitary animal like the gorilla, whose families seem more often to be found in isolation? One cannot be certain. But it seems very plausible to assume, with Darwin, Atkinson<sup>1</sup> and Freud,<sup>2</sup> that man's immediate ancestors were socially more like gorillas than baboons. At any rate, the family, not the troop, is from the psychological point of view the important unit. Clans claiming a common descent with common rites and common allegiances are clearly modelled after the family, not after the troop.

In the second place, what was the status of the adolescent males? Were they driven out as Freud<sup>3</sup> assumes? Or did they, like young baboons, remain

<sup>1</sup> *Primal Law.*

<sup>2</sup> *Totem and Taboo.*

in the family, alternating between homosexual dependence on their father and surreptitious flirtations with his wives? Here again there is no certainty. Perhaps both systems were possible, the character of individual fathers, in each case, determining which was actually adopted.

We may at least be certain that there were periodic revolutions. But was the father always killed, as in Freud's reconstruction, or merely deposed? In the pre-human family, that is, in the days before man became animistic, the father's position lasted no longer than his potency and strength. When his potency declined, his wives would tend to desert him for his sons, who, emboldened by this sexual success, would challenge him—successfully if his other powers had also declined—and then fall out among themselves until the old family was split into several new ones. At this period, before man became psychotic, the son's jealous hatred of their father was probably forgotten as soon as their frustrations were over. If so, the father was not hunted down and killed, but merely driven into a solitary and bad-tempered exile. I imagine him as a sort of rogue gorilla, beating his breasts and roaring defiance, working up courage to attack and if possible regain at least some part of his lost dominion.

With the gradual prolongation of the infancy period, however, the father's reign must have been unnaturally prolonged. His real strength and potency was supplemented by his *mana*—the projection derived from the omnipotent phase of a prolonged and more helpless infancy. But there must have been an intermediate period between the periods of early deposition and venerable old age. Then I imagine the longer reign to have been

paid for in the end by a more serious fate. Out of sight would no longer be out of mind. When the father's *mana* failed at last to protect him, it may well have been sufficient to secure his being killed and eaten for his mystic strength. This end is a regular content of the Œdipean fantasy, which is dramatised in sacramental rites. It is quite likely to have been once the common lot of fathers.

One must not suppose that the father was the only receptacle for projected fantasies. The mothers too must have slowly won a mystic importance. But, while there was a common father in the polygamous family, there was no common mother. Moreover, the same projective mechanisms, which were equipping the parents with their mystic prestige, must, at the same time, have been animating the phenomena of nature, peopling the world with spirits, and resuscitating the dead in the form of ghosts. In particular, the ghosts of dead grandfathers must have begun to compete, as an object of awe, with living fathers. We can only guess the forms in which the earliest ghosts first manifested themselves; whether they inhabited the bodies of animals, or appeared as men, as fetishes, or as natural phenomena. But we know that ghosts and spirits, totems and gods, grew in relative importance until they came to be identified more closely with the fantasied parents of infancy than the real parents. Children ceased to grow up.<sup>1</sup> They remained children, dependent upon imaginary parents all their lives and long after their actual parents were dead.

Fathers who were especially formidable in life would be likely to have the most formidable ghosts, able perhaps to preserve their authority for some

<sup>1</sup> Róheim, *Riddle of the Sphinx*, 1934, p. 214.



time after death and so to prevent the immediate disruption of the family. As Freud suggested in *Totem and Taboo*, the first ghost to achieve this work of preserving the unity of a family, which would otherwise have split up after his death, may have been the ghost of a murdered father. Ghosts are certainly powerful not only in proportion to their power in life, but also in proportion to the amount of guilt aroused at their death. But such guilt might be derived from the Œdipean fantasies of the unconscious as well as from real Œdipean acts. It is possible that the fathers whose authority was best preserved after death, may have been, not those who were killed, but those whose prestige or *mana* was sufficient to preserve them from their families when they were alive.

At any rate, it was certainly the power of ghosts—if this word may be defined widely to include any symbol of a departed father—that developed families into clans. The most primitive communities we know of are gerontocratic: a man enjoys prestige in proportion to his age. There are no single chiefs to represent the primal father. But the clan is cemented by common taboos, common rites, and a common veneration for its old men and its ancestral totem. The autocratic primal father is replaced by an endo-psychic force—the super-ego, which is identified with the old men and with the ghosts of ancestors still living in the totem species.

In such chiefless matrilineal clans, the real father has sunk extremely low. His authority over his own children has passed to his brother-in-law. Even his part in their procreation is denied. They are reincarnations of ancestral spirits. The real father only opens the door for them to enter. That such

ignorance results from the repression of a former knowledge is suggested by the symbolism of primitive theory: when a woman is bathing, spirit children may enter her in the form of eels<sup>1</sup>; or she may get a child by allowing the water from a stalactite to drip upon her.<sup>2</sup>

Primitive communistic or rather gerontocratic cultures of this kind have immense advantages over the primal or cyclopean family. Without the larger size and greater continuity of the clan neither language nor any of the crafts could have been developed.

Among less primitive peoples, we find the autocratic principle continued, or more probably restored. Fathers, in the person of the chief or king, have not only come back into their own; they wield an absolute authority—at least within certain spheres—undreamed of by the primal father.<sup>3</sup> But their authority no longer rests on actual strength; they owe it to an alliance with ancestral ghosts. Two types of such king may be distinguished: the god-king, who is the reincarnation of his ancestors, and the priest-king, who is the mouth-piece of his god.<sup>4</sup>

Primitive autocracies enjoy the advantages of disciplined organization, which is lacking in the still more primitive communist gerontocracies. But there must be a corresponding loss in freedom.

<sup>1</sup> F. E. Williams, *Physical Paternity in the Morehead District, Papua*, Man. xxxiii, p. 123-4.

<sup>2</sup> Malinowski, *The Sexual Life of Savages*, 1929, p. 155. See also Dr. W. J. Perry, *Theology and Physiological Paternity*, Man. xxxii, p. 175-6. Róheim, 'Coming into Being,' *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, 1938.

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Róheim, *Riddle of the Sphinx*, 1934, Chapter IV.

<sup>4</sup> Typified by the kings of Egypt and Babylon respectively.

The higher cultures seem to have oscillated more than once between communistic or rather democratic and autocratic systems. Possibly they may continue to oscillate for many centuries to come. Cultural progress has both profited and suffered under each. Each offers its characteristic satisfactions; and their relative happiness is difficult to assess. Were Chaka's proud warriors, living under an iron discipline, less happy than the care-free Australians? Was the Athenian happier than the Spartan? To the neurotic child, tortured by aggressive impulses he can ill control, freedom is often synonymous with insecurity and an intensification of his conflicts. The neurotic adult often has a similar incapacity to enjoy himself when free.

## CHAPTER VI

### EDUCATION AND CULTURE

#### 1. *Temperament and some of its earliest determinants*

THE last chapter was concerned with some of the social and psychological characters that distinguish man from other animals. We argued that the extreme helplessness and long duration of his infancy were ultimately responsible for his neurotic anxiety and his animism—or habit of projecting his own infantile feelings upon his environment—and that his animism, in particular his tendency to rediscover the good and bad parents of his unconscious fantasy in the persons of his leaders and his enemies, is responsible both for his co-operative and competitive tendencies, for his social solidarity and for his proneness to war. In this chapter, we will discuss some of the ways in which education in the widest sense—by which I mean the treatment of the child by his elders from birth to adolescence—may influence the specific character of a society. In short, while the last chapter was concerned with the difference between men and other animals, this is concerned with the smaller differences—so far as these are acquired and not innate—between the different races and cultures of men.

The character of a society may be defined, accurately enough for our purpose, as the average character—a Galton or 'composite' photograph of the characters of the individuals that compose it. In practice the concept is precise only in proportion

to the homogeneity of the society it refers to. The average man, the average European, the average Englishman, the average English cavalry officer, are concepts forming an ascending series in order of precision. In the case of the average man, the psychological equivalent of the Galton photograph is blurred by wide variations. Only certain very general features—those discussed in the last chapter—stand out with any clarity. In the picture of the average European, other more specific features—comparable for instance with his light colour—are discernible; and progressively more in the average Englishman and the average English cavalry officer.

The psychological picture of the average Pitchentara (a Central Australian tribe) is still more precise; his society is more homogeneous even than that of cavalry officers. The similarity of cavalry officers to each other is relatively superficial. They have the same code of behaviour, that is, the same group ideal, the product of public school and regimental influence; but their temperaments differ greatly. Some may be optimistic others pessimistic, some generous others stingy, etc. The similarity of Pitchentara men to each other seems far closer. Not only do they have the same code of behaviour, the same group ideal, the product, perhaps, of initiation. Even their temperaments, according to Róheim, are largely homogeneous; they are all optimistic and all generous.

What is the cause of this homogeneity of temperament? It may be partly racial; the Pitchentara are racially far more homogeneous than English cavalry officers. But a more important factor would seem to be the standardized conditions of their infancy.



Róheim has made a very striking comparison between Central Australians, of which the Pitchentara may be taken as typical, and the Normanby Islanders. The Central Australian baby is never refused the nipple; it is never even weaned. Children of eight or nine suck the breast of their own or someone else's mother whenever they want to; though of course they no longer rely on it exclusively for food. The Central Australian adult is generous and often fatally optimistic. He lives in a land of frequent famine; yet he never hoards his food.<sup>1</sup>

The Normanby Island baby is treated far more harshly; he suffers a relatively large amount of oral frustration.<sup>2</sup> He grows up in a land of plenty where famine is unheard of. Yet his life is dominated by the desire to collect the biggest possible hoard of food. Moreover, though he desires to be thought generous, he is really extremely stingy and grasping.

It is impossible not to be struck by this juxtaposition of facts. Free feeding and late weaning would seem to promote generosity and optimism. Oral deprivation and early weaning would seem to promote stinginess and greed. To say more would be to over-simplify the generalization. Many other factors must influence these temperamental traits. For instance, the attitude to cleanliness is probably important, since we know from analysis that the

<sup>1</sup> 'Psycho-Analysis of Primitive Culture Types,' *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, xiii, 1932, p. 78; *Riddle of the Sphinx*, 1934, p. 30.

<sup>2</sup> This point was made by Dr. Róheim in the discussion following a paper he read to the British Psycho-Analytical Society, 1937.

miser, who fiercely clings to his possessions, is often symbolically returning to the coprophilic interests which he was compelled to give up in the nursery.<sup>1</sup> Thus the fact that the Central Australians do not expect their children to be clean may help to condition their thriftless generosity.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the Normanby Island baby is house-trained with great firmness; but I do not know. Moreover, the effects of early sexual experience, which Róheim emphasizes, remains to be considered.

But at least we know enough to draw one practical deduction—even at this stage. If greed and generosity are determined by the conditions of infancy rather than by anything in later life, an acquisitive society cannot be made generous, or a thriftless one thrifty, merely by altering the legal basis of its economic system. Civilized nations are notoriously acquisitive, being in this respect far more like Normanby Islanders than Central Australians. A large proportion of civilized people, in planning their lives, choose whatever occupation promises the highest pay. Others are influenced more by the type of occupation, and choose, if they can, something that satisfies their creative impulse even if the pay is relatively low. The mere abolition of capitalism might not effect the relative proportion of these two types at all. But, on the analogy of the Central Australians, one would expect a postponement of weaning to decrease the number of acquisitive persons. Unfortunately, there is no obvious

<sup>1</sup> Ernest Jones, *Papers on Psycho-Analysis*, 4th Edn., pp. 531-5, *seq.*

<sup>2</sup> Róheim, 'Psycho-Analysis of Primitive Cultural Types,' *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, xiii, 1932, p. 85.

reason to suppose that it would also increase the number of creative ones.<sup>1</sup>

Let us return to savages, whose temperaments are often so conveniently homogeneous,<sup>2</sup> and seek other generalizations which may be applicable to ourselves.

Dr. Margaret Mead, in *Sex and Temperament*, provides us with some very striking comparisons between New Guinea tribes. The Arapesh and the Mundugumor are racially similar; but their temperaments are entirely different. The Arapesh are a delightful people, modest, unselfish, co-operative and peaceful. The Mundugumor are arrogant and aggressive, being so quarrelsome that they are incapable of co-operating except for head-hunting expeditions. Indeed head-hunting, before it was abolished by our government, was the central feature of their culture, which Dr. Mead tells us, has now ceased to function, like a clock with a broken mainspring. Now these differences in temperament appear to be the direct result of differences in the treatment of children. For while the Arapesh regard the crying of a child as a calamity to be prevented at all costs, the Mundugumor seem almost to dislike their children and so neglect them that they often die.

Here again the sociological inferences seem obvious and important. If we wish to abolish war we should cease to put our faith too much in leagues and covenants, and learn from the Arapesh how to

<sup>1</sup> Sometimes the creative impulse would seem to be, in part at least, a 'reparative' reaction against excessive greed.

<sup>2</sup> According to some authorities this homogeneity of savages is greatly exaggerated. But few, I think, would deny that they are at least more homogeneous than we are.

run our nurseries. We should, however, be careful to preach these reforms to our neighbours before we begin to practise them ourselves. For while the Arapesh have been driven into the most inhospitable regions of New Guinea, where they survive only because they excite no envy, the Mundugumor have a large area—far larger than they can ever use—of the richest country to themselves.<sup>1</sup>

So far we have been concerned mainly with some of the effects of too early weaning, that is in technical language of an oral trauma, on the average character of a society. Now we know from psycho-analysis that sexual traumata are also important, so that wherever some specific sexual trauma is a common experience among children in any society we should expect to find its effects on the average temperament. This, indeed, appears to be the case. For, according to Róheim,<sup>2</sup> the Central Australians and the Normanby Islanders have temperamental

<sup>1</sup> Even if we were not exposed to the ravages of the Mundugumors of our world, the adoption of the Arapesh system might not, it must be admitted, entirely solve the problem of the art of life. For, though the Arapesh are delightfully pacific, they are also sensitive to an uncomfortable degree. If they are insulted, they do not retaliate. But they are not indifferent to the insult; they dissolve in tears and sometimes threaten suicide. Their pacifism, therefore, would seem to be determined not only by a genuine low level of aggressiveness, but also by some inhibition that turns their aggression in upon themselves. The source of such an inhibition is probably also to be found in infancy, the conditions of which are perhaps not so perfect as they seem.

<sup>2</sup> *Riddle of the Sphinx*, 1934, p. 158 seq; 'Psycho-Analysis of Primitive Cultural Types,' *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, xiii, 1932, pp. 117, 183-4.

2.. *Is temperament uniquely determined by the infantile situation?*

The above examples—taken from cultures that are relatively homogeneous both in their temperaments and in their treatment of their children—tend to prove the immense importance of infantile experience in forming the temperament of the adult. But what exactly are their implications? At first sight, one may be tempted to believe that the infantile situation uniquely determines character and that if we can control the one we can make the other what we like. But before accepting this conclusion, let us examine one more characteristic of several primitive societies to see whether this too is uniquely determined by infantile experience.

Savages in general—though there are doubtless many exceptions—are often said to be lazy and quite incapable of sustained work. This really means, I think, not that the savage is less energetic, but that he is able to be idle without becoming neurotic. Leisure is no problem for him; he has no difficulty in enjoying it. In the civilized man, on the other hand, the feeling of having a job and doing it well is nearly always essential to well-being. If he loses it, his depression is not solely the result of his actual loss of income. Moreover, he regards those who live at ease with a curious blend of envy and contempt.

The unconscious motives satisfied by work are many and varied. Broadly speaking, it is an outlet for both aggressive and reparative trends. Take, for instance, the writing of a scientific book. Often enough the author begins with analysis and ends with synthesis; having dismembered the arguments of his predecessors, he reunites them into a better whole. He is like the small boy who takes a clock to pieces



and puts it together again; or, to take a mythological parallel, he combines the roles of Set and Isis, who between them dismembered Osiris and restored him. Then again, work, especially in puritan countries, relieves the sense of guilt. The scrupulous, highly conscientious worker is often punishing himself. He has to work more than is necessary before he permits himself a holiday. When he retires altogether, he often has a breakdown. The element of payment may be important, even to the rich man who does not need it. Payment reassures the unconscious that the work is valuable, that it has really restored something, and that by it forgiveness has been earned. The ability to make money is also a reassurance against the unconscious fear of starvation, which often has little relation to the actual danger. The infant has to wait passively for food, often a prey to intense anxiety. The confident worker knows that he can always earn his keep. He can feed himself by his own effort and does not have to wait passively to be fed by others. The rich man who has no job is often far more afraid of destitution than the poor man who is confident of his ability to get work and do it well.

To what then are we to attribute the different attitude to work in the savage? The desire for paid work as a reassurance against the fear of destitution, which may be strong in people who are rich enough not to need it, is probably correlated with early oral frustrations, which we expect to find more in civilized than in savage man. But the other unconscious motives for work—the need for self-punishment, the desire to have an outlet for aggression and at the same time to re-create or restore what has been unconsciously destroyed—may be much the

same in both. If so, the difference in attitude towards work cannot spring from differences in the early treatment of children. It must result from differences in later education, or from some conditions effecting the lives of adults.

The old tendency of educationalists to regard infancy as unimportant, and to believe that the foundation of character is formed at school, has been corrected by psycho-analysis. But we should avoid the opposite danger of underestimating the influence of later education. The inevitable conditions of infancy, especially the extreme helplessness of the infant, are responsible for anxiety and rage; and the mechanism of projection peoples the world with good and evil forces, which increase or decrease this primary anxiety and rage. The degree of goodness or badness of the animate world in general, and of the two parent images in particular and so the form of the *Œdipus* complex, is determined by innate differences in temperament and by the actual amount of stimulus and frustration experienced in infancy. But there are many alternative ways of dealing with the resulting anxiety; and the choice depends largely on the later stages of education. Each culture through its specific form of education makes as it were a selection of a few of these possible alternatives, which are thus 'institutionalized,' that is, favoured by its group ideal.

The method of dealing with neurotic anxiety which above all others is institutionalized in civilized communities is work. Among savages, however, work has a much smaller psychological importance. What then takes its place?

The savage is said to be not only idler, but also more licentious, than the civilized man. Before

puberty he suffers the minimum of deprivation; he plays sexual games unchecked with the children of his own age. Even after puberty, only certain women are taboo; there is usually still plenty of free love to be enjoyed, which is by no means incompatible with the group ideal. Now love-making does not only satisfy the sexual impulse; it is a powerful reassurance against neurotic anxiety;<sup>1</sup> it drives out fear. The savage, therefore, is less in need of other forms of reassurance than the more inhibited civilized man. This may be one reason why he has less drive to work.

The fact that as a reassurance against neurotic anxiety love-making may be an alternative to work gives a certain *a priori* plausibility to a statistical argument, elaborated by Dr. Unwin, according to whom there is a close correlation between the degree of sexual restrictions imposed in any culture and the amount of its social energy. It should be observed, however, that Dr. Unwin measured social energy mainly in terms of the amount of energy expended on religion—in tending the dead, building temples, etc. Therefore the correlation that immediately results from his statistics would seem to be less between chastity and energy, than between chastity and piety.<sup>2</sup> This too is what might be expected,

<sup>1</sup> See Melanie Klein, *The Psycho-Analysis of Children*, 1932, pp. 276-7, 299, 333.

<sup>2</sup> So far as Unwin measures the chastity of a culture in terms of the restraints imposed on its women alone, and its social energy in terms of its religious development, the main deduction from his statistics is that religious men are especially jealous of their wives and daughters. The wider deduction that he actually draws is based on the assumptions, (a) that female chastity is a measure of the

since religion, like work, provides an alternative reassurance against neurotic fears.

Sir James Frazer, in a short paragraph which he did not enlarge, points out that the most pacific peoples are also the most immoral by our standards. War and sexual prohibitions are both almost entirely absent among the Eskimo of the Arctic regions and the Todas of India.<sup>1</sup> Here then is another correlation, this time between sexual restrictions and war. One of the many reasons for such a correlation may be again that war, like work, love-making and religion, is a method of dealing with neurotic anxiety. If love-making is unchecked, the need for the others is correspondingly diminished.

Yet another form of reassurance is the neurotic symptom. The function of obsessional avoidances and rituals is to reduce anxiety, which becomes intense if the obsession is not observed. Now the savage grows up in a world where obsessions are institutionalized. After initiation a large part of his life is dominated by rituals and taboos. Irksome as these may be to the really healthy individual, they must be a great relief to whoever has much unconscious anxiety to deal with. They save him the trouble of developing his own symptoms. Moreover, they are socially far more satisfactory. The civilized neurotic is ashamed of his symptoms. Rituals and taboos are universally approved, and no one is ashamed of observing them. The civilized man, of course, may find the same relief in religion. But

chastity of a community as a whole, and (b) that religious development is a measure of social energy. See 'A Discussion on Sexual Regulations and Cultural Behaviour,' *British Journal of Medical Psychology*, xv, pp. 153-63.

<sup>1</sup> Frazer, *Totemism and Exogamy*, iv, pp. 88-9.

science has made this form of relief more difficult. New political religions, indeed, have begun to take the place of the old theological ones. But for many civilized neurotics, the only alternatives are neurotic symptoms or an obsessional drive to work. The savage has a wider choice.

Thus the proverbial laziness of the savage may be conditioned by a variety of factors in his life. His infancy may have left him with as much latent anxiety as the civilized man; but with fewer sexual inhibitions. His group ideal, which in our own culture reinforces sexual inhibitions, is by no means puritanical. Indeed, it encourages a certain licence, provided that the incest taboos only are observed. Moreover, it offers him institutionalized rituals and taboos. Therefore, he can get reassurance both in love-making and in the observance of his cult, and does not need the escape of work.

Not only does he not need work as a reassurance. It is not required of him by his group ideal. Civilized communities now despise the idler; savage communities do not.

Character and temperament are determined, therefore, not only by the infantile situation, as we were tempted to suppose, but also by the group ideal, which comes into force during the later stages of education.

### 3. *The group ideal*<sup>1</sup>

The orthodox educationalist may neglect the infancy period, because he does not understand its

<sup>1</sup> See Freud, *Collected Papers*, vol. iv, p. 59; *General Selection*, p. 141, 195-244; Róheim, 'Super-Ego and Group Ideal,' *International Journal of Psycho-Analysis*, xiii, 175.



effects; but he regards ideal-building as one of his main functions. Here, at least, the Australian initiator and the English schoolmaster agree.

The basis of the group-ideal is, of course, the super-ego, the parental authority incorporated by the child in the early period.<sup>1</sup> But the process of incorporation does not cease with childhood; it continues certainly till adolescence, and probably, at a slower rate, until the end of life. We all—especially in the period between childhood and adolescence and at certain crises within this period, such as initiation or confirmation—tend to acquire the ideals of persons we respect and who make it their business to impose their code. Such persons already embody our super-egos; indeed it is a condition of our acceptance of their ideals that they should do so. Thus the group-ideal is a late incorporation superimposed upon the earlier super-ego. In a sense, it is an outer layer of the super-ego; but, unlike the core, it is conscious and within limits flexible. A man transplanted to a new society may change his group-ideal. His super-ego remains immutable, or is at most the subject of much slower change.

That the group ideals of different cultures differ greatly from each other is a truism, which still needs stressing. We have already discussed some differences in the attitude to work, sex and superstition in savage and civilized communities. But it is worth while to consider other examples. Though a civilized nation is composed of several groups with slightly dissimilar ideals, that of the public school may be taken as typical in England; since, in some measure, it has been imposed on the country as a whole.

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 50-1.

Roughly speaking, it is the sportsman's ideal of 'playing the game.' It includes honesty, courage, a certain contempt for the slacker; and in the sexual sphere, while it winks at some degree of fornication, it condemns the seduction of the innocent, and adultery with the wives of friends. One has only to cross the Channel to find a group ideal that differs in several points; and anthropology is familiar with ideals that are exactly opposite: among the Dobuans, the 'unsportsman' the man who can make a clever foul, and get away with it, is most held in honour.<sup>1</sup>

So far we have abstracted two important determinants of personality: the infantile situation and the group ideal. How are we to assess their relative weight? As a first approximation we may make infantile experience responsible for temperament, and the group ideal for character. Then temperament becomes the foundation and character the upper story of the mental structure. But this analogy is not really very close, for the mind develops as a whole like a plant, not in sections like a house. What the infantile situation determines, therefore, is not so much a part of the resultant personality as a given range of potential personalities, which is progressively limited by later influences, and in particular by the group ideal.

#### 4. *Congenial and approved responses*

Education is often said to widen the potentialities of the individual. Certainly a given system of education enables a man to become something that he could not have been without it. But under another system he would have become something that he could not have become under the first.

<sup>1</sup> Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture*, 1935, pp. 142, 250.

Therefore, in comparing different systems, it is convenient to regard the potentialities of the individual as almost infinite, and education as the means by which they are progressively restricted.<sup>1</sup>

His potentialities at birth are bounded only by his innate equipment; if his innate intelligence is low he will not become an Einstein, if he is unmusical he will not become a Bach; but his range is still immensely wide: he may become a criminal, a lunatic or saint. He may be brave or cowardly, cruel or kind, idle or industrious, happy or depressed.

By the time he is a few years old these potentialities will have been already considerably curtailed. Like other children, he will have acquired the general pattern of irrational anxieties, the ills all men are heir to. But some of its details will be stressed above, others below, the average. He will have his own specific pattern which determines the limits of his potential character.

Now it is important to realize that in man the pattern of irrational anxiety is one of the 'mainsprings of life. The healthy animal reacts only to real needs (hunger, sex etc.) and real dangers. But the majority

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Ruth Benedict in *Patterns of Culture* regards each culture as a selection from the almost infinite potentialities of man; but leaves what may be called the 'selective agent' rather indeterminate. In her view, I think it would be mainly the group ideal. In Dr. Margaret Mead's view, on the other hand, the main selective agent would seem to be the infantile situation. But since the group ideal obviously influences the treatment of children, the two views are not necessarily incompatible. The concept of a *progressive* limitation of the potentialities of the individual as he grows up in a given society would seem useful in order to separate the different factors that operate at different ages.

of man's reactions, in the last analysis, are to imaginary needs and dangers. Even those reactions which seem at first sight to be purely instinctive are, in part, determined by irrational fears. Thus the hoarding impulse, so highly developed among the Normanby Islanders, is not merely a rational response to a real need for food, but also an irrational response to the imaginary dangers of infancy when the slightest delay in feeding was interpreted as a threat of absolute starvation. Even the sexual craving, which might seem, if anything, to be wholly determined by a periodic physical need, is in large measure a craving for reassurance to counteract the unconscious and irrational terrors both of persecution and of loss. That such activities as work, war and religion may be products of infantile neurosis is less surprising; for these things are not found in animals and cannot be dismissed as merely instinctive. Work may seem an evil to those who have too much of it; but, as we have seen, the absence of it—apart altogether from the question of wages and salaries—is apt, among civilized races, to precipitate neurosis. As to the impulses that underlie war and religion, these too, as we know, are largely derived from the psychotic mechanisms of early childhood.<sup>1</sup> The main activities of man, therefore, so far as they are not instinctive, may be conceived as reactions to, or modes of dealing with, unconscious and irrational anxieties.<sup>2</sup>

Not all such modes of reaction, however, are

<sup>1</sup> See p. 106 *seq.* above.

<sup>2</sup> See Melanie Klein and Joan Riviere, *Love, Hate and Reparation*, 1937. We seem to avoid anxiety by symbolically attacking the bad and defending or restoring the good objects of our unconscious fantasy.

equally appropriate to a given pattern of unconscious anxiety. Thus, for instance, in the Middle Ages, one man might find happiness in the camp, another in a monastery, while both would have been miserable if their rôles had been exchanged. Or again, to narrow the field still further, one might find the solution of his problems only within the Roman Catholic, another only in the Protestant Church. On the other hand, for most people, so long as they are young, there are probably some alternative solutions to the problem of life. The medieval theologian, for example,—although he might have never made a soldier—might have been equally contented as a philosopher or mathematician had he chanced to live in an age of doubt rather than of faith. To each specific pattern of unconscious anxiety, therefore, there probably corresponds a certain range of appropriate reactions, which would not be appropriate to some other pattern. These, to borrow Dr. Benedict's term, might be called the 'congenial' responses of the individual concerned.<sup>1</sup>

The infancy period, which determines the specific pattern of anxiety, must determine also this range of congenial responses. Or rather, to stick to our idea of education as a means of limiting the potentialities of the individual, the infancy period limits the range of congenial responses. In the case of the medieval theologian, for example, it already excludes a military career. If he had become a soldier, his unconscious anxieties would have been increased rather than relieved. He would have been mal-adjusted, unhappy and neurotic.

It was not infancy, however, that excluded the career of a philosopher; for we have supposed that

<sup>1</sup> *Patterns of Culture*, p. 254.



philosophy would have been equally congenial as far as his basic temperament was concerned. This alternative was excluded only at a later stage, by a group ideal that regarded critical philosophers as fit only for the stake.

Three factors, therefore, stand out as determinants which progressively limit the potentialities of the individual: his innate endowment; the experiences of his infancy, which determine the specific pattern of his neurotic anxieties and with them a certain range of *congenial* responses; and, lastly, the group ideal of his culture, which determine a certain range of *approved* responses.<sup>1</sup>

#### 5. *Relation between congenial and approved responses*

The congenial and approved responses of any individual or culture may be regarded as two areas or fields in the almost limitless range of possible behaviour. There are then four alternative relations between these fields: (*a*, *b*) Either may be wholly within the other; (*c*) they may intersect; and (*d*) they may be mutually exclusive. We will consider these alternatives in turn.

(*a*) If the group ideal is extremely tolerant, the field of *approved* responses will include the whole

<sup>1</sup> In psycho-analytical language, the Id and the super-ego determine congenial responses; and the group ideal determines approved responses. It is important to realize that the group ideal, though based on the super-ego, may differ widely from it. Where precision is of secondary importance, I shall sometimes use the word 'temperament' in place of the more cumbersome expression 'range of congenial responses.' But whereas the former is a part of personality, the latter is as it were only one of the co-ordinates of personality. See p. 139 above.

field of *congenial* ones, every congenial response will be permitted or encouraged. The culture will have a rich variety of life, bounded only by the influence of the current form of the infantile situation. In such a culture, if it anywhere exists, the moral influence of later education could almost be neglected. Perhaps a faint approximation to this type is to be found among the North American tribes described by Dr. Ruth Benedict. Their group ideal is wide enough to give scope to a great range of individual temperaments. Even the invert finds his recognized place as a transvestit, or *berdache*.<sup>1</sup>

(b) More generally, the field of *approved* responses will lie within the field of *congenial* ones. The individual will not be able to choose from among all the various responses congenial to his temperamental needs. But he will be encouraged to choose some of them, and will find his niche in life. The culture will be well adapted to the psychology of its members; but will be less varied than a culture with a more tolerant group ideal. The Arapesh, the Normanby Islanders and the Mundugumor, although totally different from each other, seem at least to belong to this common type. Their group ideals permit them congenial outlets for their psychological needs: in constructive work, in inverted capitalism, and in head-hunting expeditions respectively. But in each case the field of permitted outlets is so small that it is unlikely to cover more than a small part of the field of congenial ones. An Arapesh, I think, could exchange his own religion for Christianity without any psychological loss to himself. Similarly a Mundugumor, although he would be miserable as a Christian, might find a sublimated outlet for his

<sup>1</sup> Ruth Benedict, *Patterns of Culture*, 1935, p. 263-4.

aggressiveness in any competitive society, perhaps even in the capitalist system of the Normanby Islanders. But a Normanby Islander, whose temperamental needs appear to be the most highly specialized, would not be happy among the Mundugumor—perhaps not in any society other than his own.

(c) Thirdly, in cultures where the fields of *congenial* and *approved* responses intersect, the people will have some good outlets for their temperamental drives, but they will also, to some extent, be daubed with psychological cosmetics to make their characters seem other than they are. For instance, a people whose specific pattern of unconscious anxieties is relieved by hard work but not, as among some others, by masochistic acts of self-immolation, will be only partially adapted to a group ideal that admires both industry and reckless courage. Their industry will be genuine enough, but their courage will be a painted and uncomfortable mask. Of the two most industrious and aggressive nations of Europe to-day, only one, I think, contains that genuine streak of masochism which makes its soldiers perhaps the most tenacious in the world. In the other, if I am not mistaken, the equally aggressive group ideal lies partly outside the bounds of temperament. If so, its soldiers will be less anxious or willing to die for their country, and may be expected to be unreliable during a retreat.

(d) The last possibility—a culture in which the fields of *congenial* and *approved* responses are mutually exclusive—sometimes occurs when a civilized nation imposes its standards upon a savage tribe. The savages may admire the alien magistrates and missionaries, and seek to live up to their group ideal.

But the effort only ends in misery and perhaps in extermination. Among the Mundugumor, head-hunting seems to have been a necessary outlet for aggression. It is now prohibited and the culture has ceased to function, as Dr. Mead says, like a clock the mainspring of which is broken. Similarly, among the Pondo of South Africa, dancing and flirting parties for the unmarried youth of both sexes seem to have been recognized and psychologically valuable. The new and more puritanical ideal, which began to radiate from the mission stations, at a time when even dancing 'was regarded as necessarily evil,' seems to have been followed by an increase in hysteria.<sup>1</sup>

6. *Interactions between infantile experience and group ideal*

Our thesis so far may be summed up very briefly by saying that personality is, in the main, a function of two variables: infantile experience and group ideal. But are these variables independent? If not, how do they interact?

Dr. Róheim, in the *Riddle of the Sphinx*, seems to suggest that the infantile situation directly determines the whole character, including the group ideal, a view which at first seemed very plausible to me. If it were correct, however, the group ideal would always be compatible with temperament (congenial responses would always be approved), and this, as we have just seen, need not be the case.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, a society in which the two are highly incompatible is certainly unhappy and probably unlikely to survive. Any society is therefore likely to select from among small mutations in its own

<sup>1</sup> Dr. Monica Hunter, *Reaction to Conquest*, 1936, pp. 180-4, 375-6.

<sup>2</sup> Because the super-ego may differ from the group ideal.

ideals, or from among those offered it by culture contact, those which most fit its temperamental needs. In this sense only, the infantile situation, assuming it constant, must influence the group ideal.

As to the converse influence, that of the group ideal upon the infantile experience in the next generation, this too may be easily exaggerated. In so far as the group ideal determines the personalities of parents, it determines also their treatment of their children. But it sometimes does so in an unexpected manner. Thus a parent, in whom occasional outbursts of aggression are psychologically congenial, but who sternly suppresses their expression, is often more irritable with his children than a parent who is less restrained; and, the children are liable to be more terrified of the vague dangers they dimly sense from the one than of the concrete slaps they get from the other. Moreover, there is no *a priori* reason to suppose that a group ideal necessarily tends to produce congenial responses compatible with itself. The puritanical parent, for example, is liable to produce in his children an enhanced need for erotic experience as a reassurance.<sup>1</sup>

#### 7. *Transmission of infantile experience and group ideal*

Though the interaction between the infantile situation and the group ideal is indirect and complex, that between each of these factors in successive generations, in a homogeneous culture, is simple and direct. Parents tend to treat their children as they themselves were treated by their parents, and so reproduce the conditions under which their own patterns of unconscious anxiety and congenial

<sup>1</sup> See pp. 134-6 above.



responses were formed. This far more than biological inheritance is, as Róheim has pointed out, the main cause of the conservation of temperament in any homogeneous culture. The group ideal, too, is in general transmitted from parents to children. Therefore homogeneous and isolated societies are extremely conservative both in their temperaments and in their group ideals.

Heterogeneous societies, however, are usually liable to fairly rapid change. Such societies may be divided into three types: those which are varied in their group ideals but not in temperament (congenial responses), those which are varied in their temperaments but not in their group ideals, and those which are varied in both these factors.

(a) The first type, that in which the group ideal but not the temperament is heterogeneous, arises when, through culture contact, a previously homogeneous society is beginning to absorb the ideals of its neighbours.<sup>1</sup> The old and new ideals will compete for mastery, and the new ones may quickly oust the old. But, since the emotional attitude of parents to their children tends to reproduce the emotional attitude of their parents towards themselves, even when they try to alter it, any change in temperament (anxiety-patterns and congenial responses) lags far behind any change in group ideal.

<sup>1</sup> A people may absorb a new ideal either because it is more compatible with their temperaments, or because it is introduced by persons they especially admire. If the son of a puritan becomes a rake, this may be because the ideal of his rakish friends is more compatible with his temperament. But if a Pondo becomes a Christian, this is probably because the missionaries are especially admired.

(b) The second type of non-homogeneous, or semi-homogeneous, society, that in which temperaments but not group-ideals are varied, is illustrated by sub-groups in civilized nations, such as political parties, or professions. These are highly conservative, and, since membership is voluntary, are usually composed of persons whose temperaments, though varied, are compatible with them. Sometimes, too, in spite of great variety of temperament, the ideals of a whole nation is homogeneous. But in such a case—since membership is not voluntary—there are likely to be many maladjusted individuals, for instance, the peaceable members of a militarist state. These will be, by temperament, predisposed to the acceptance of some alternative to the national ideal, which will therefore be unstable. In Germany, where the teaching of the current moral philosophy is quickly accepted by the nation as a whole, the group-ideal seems to oscillate between that of Sparta and of Athens. Either would seem to satisfy the temperamental needs of the main body of the people; but each probably leaves a fringe of maladjusted individuals who, in time, initiate the next swing of the moral pendulum.

(c) The third type, varied both in temperaments and ideals, is illustrated by any of the larger democracies of Europe and America. The transmission of temperament is far less pronounced than in temperamentally homogeneous societies. When two parents have different temperaments they do not, in general, reproduce for their children the same infantile situation in which either of their own temperaments were formed, but some compromise which may have an entirely different result. In such cases, the children are liable to be maladjusted to the

ideals they were brought up on and which may have been well suited to their parents. But this disadvantage is offset, to some extent, by the existence of a rich variety of other group ideals to choose from. Thus the æsthetic son of a soldier may find his spiritual home in Chelsea—to the disappointment of his father but to the satisfaction of himself.

In fully heterogeneous societies of this kind, both temperaments and group-ideals are subject to fairly rapid change. But whereas the change in group-ideal may result from deliberate propaganda, that in temperament is likely to be fortuitous and unpredictable. For the infantile situation will be determined far more by the temperaments of the two parents (of which there are innumerable permutations) than by any theories of education they may hold.

#### 8. *Summary and applications*

To sum up the main thesis of this chapter. The character or personality of an individual or homogeneous society would seem to be a function of two relatively independent variables: the infantile situation, which determines the range of congenial responses (temperamental needs), and the group-ideal, which determines the range of approved ones. Such a general proposition is, however, worthless except as a guide to the collection of a mass of detailed facts. In the first place, we need some fairly accurate assessment of the temperaments of a large number of homogeneous groups; whether they are greedy or generous, virile or effeminate, aggressive or pacific, lazy or industrious, etc. We also want to know their ideals and whether their ideal characters correspond with their real ones or not. Field anthropologists usually give this information accurately

enough; but mistakes may occur when the ideal differ from the practice. Thus the Normanby Islanders like to appear generous, for generosity is part of their group-ideal, but they are really very greedy.<sup>1</sup> In the second place, we need a very detailed account of the treatment of children, in these groups, at successive ages of their development: in the early period, whether they are carried about by their mothers and fed as often as they are hungry, or whether they are often left alone to scream; whether they are weaned early or late; whether they are expected to be clean and if so at what age, or whether they are allowed to be as dirty as they like; whether they are allowed free sexual play with other children; whether their parents and older relations stimulate their genitals; whether they have opportunities of seeing their parents' intercourse, etc. Here too anthropologists are beginning to supply the relevant facts; but far more information is needed before definite correlations can be established.

The task, I suggest, is one for psycho-analysis and anthropology in co-operation. The psycho-analyst's job should be to say what factors to look for; and the anthropologist's to determine their relative weight. By this means it should be possible accurately to fill the columns in a schedule with the following headings: name of culture—infantile situation—temperamental needs (congenial responses)—group-ideal (approved responses)—actual character.

With such a schedule before us, we might hope to formulate laws of sociology, which would give to man, what he has never had before, the power to mould the character of future generations according to his will.

<sup>1</sup> Róheim, *Riddle of the Sphinx*, 1934, p. 158.

Neither the educationalist nor the sociologist of the past have had this power; because both neglected or misunderstood the supreme factor of infantile experience. The educationalist, outside the narrow field of school curriculum, worked almost in the dark.<sup>1</sup> He may have had a fairly clear idea of the kind of traits he wanted to produce and of the kind he wanted to avoid. But he could only preach the desirability of his ideal of virtue, his group-ideal—honesty, reliability, determination, generosity, kindness and so on—he had no idea how a temperament compatible with this ideal is actually developed. He usually thought it could be produced by an effort of will. But since will or determination was already on his list of virtues, this argument is clearly circular. He may indeed have succeeded in imposing his ideal; but he could not alter a temperament which did not fit it. He did not even understand the conditions of his limited success, namely, that, in each case, in order to impose his group-ideal on a pupil whose temperament was not adapted to it, some accident of his own personality must have made him an apt symbol of a super-ego that is already formed.

The utopian sociologist in general still misunderstands his problem. His fiery eloquence may change a group ideal and through it the economic and political structure of society. But unless temperamental potentialities exist that are appropriate to the new structure, it cannot possibly succeed. If not, his only course is to resign himself to a far slower but more fundamental attack upon the

<sup>1</sup> This ignorance is now being remedied by the work of Dr. Susan Isaacs and others who are applying their knowledge of psycho-analysis with marked success to education.



society he disapproves of, and, by modifying the infantile situation, seek to mould temperament to fit his utopian dream. In other words, he must first become an enlightened educationalist.

But even power and knowledge are unsatisfactory unless there is some agreement upon the aim. Moral judgments are notoriously subjective. Is the fate of the world to be determined by the strife of rival educationalists each rationally seeking to mould the temperaments of future generations in accordance with their own ideals? If ideals were to remain as varied as they are at present, this indeed might be the melancholy prospect. As in the physical world so in the world of mind the war of ideals would continue, but with more efficient weapons. Fortunately, however, we have good reason to suppose that in the sphere of morals both the area and the intensity of the conflict will decrease concurrently with an increase in our power to make our hopes prevail. For, on the one hand, a deeper understanding of our own psychology will automatically decrease psychological disease, and therefore also those extreme ideals (e.g. fanatical militarism, asceticism, etc.) which are themselves among the symptoms of disease. And, in the second place, this greater understanding of ourselves will bring greater sympathy with, and therefore tolerance of, the residual deviations of ideal that will no doubt remain. Thus we may hope that one day the infant science of psycho-analytical anthropology will perform the Herculean task—which has so far defeated the philosophies and religions of the world—of giving *homo sapiens* the wisdom that his name implies. Once he acquires this, a rational society, in the political and economic sense, will come almost of its own accord.



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